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FANTASTIC STORY
MAGAZINE
FEATURING
THE CONQUERORS
by DAVID H. KELLER
VIA THE HEWITT RAY
by M. F. RUPERT
WORLD'S PHARAOH
by KELVIN KENT
MEN OF HONOR
by WILL GARTH
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FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

Vol. 2, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION SUMMER, 1951

A Full-Length Novel

THE CONQUERORS **DAVID H. KELLER 9**
These strange little men came up out of the earth—and wielded a power that was mighty enough to destroy the world of humanity

A Complete Novel

VIA THE HEWITT RAY . . . . . M. F. RUPERT 95
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Where science fiction readers and the editor talk matters over

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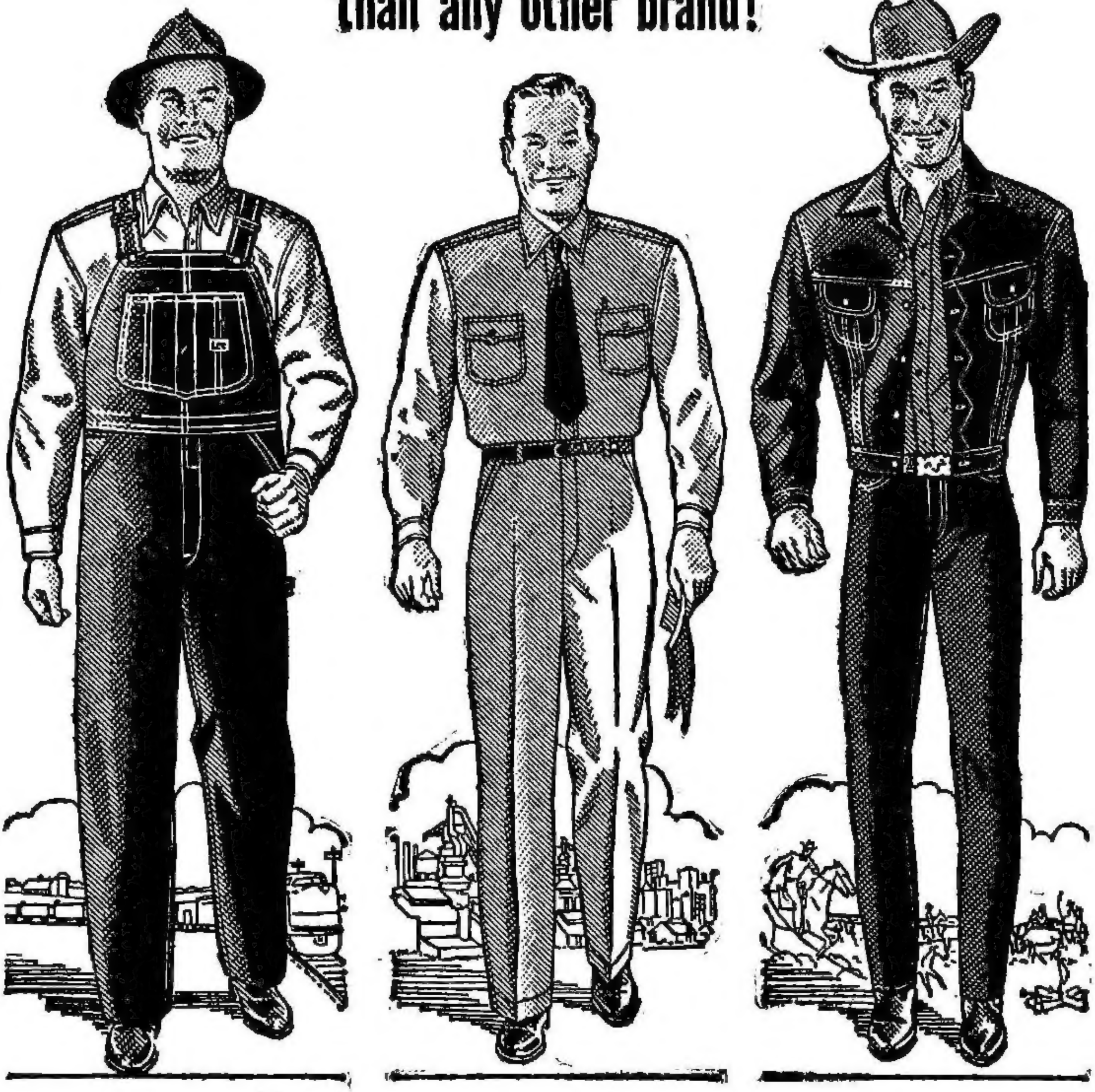

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A DEPARTMENT WHERE SCIENCE FICTION READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

RECENTLY, while rereading our dog-eared copy of Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Emperors*, we happened to lay eyes on a footnote that caused us to do some pondering upon the physical growth of mankind during the few thousand years just past. This footnote was not earth-shaking in itself—it merely stated that the average height of the Roman male during the Empire was five feet two inches.

But it started us to considering the whole matter of "little people"—not the authentic pygmies of Africa and the Philippines but the runt races of Northern and Western Europe whose memory has come down to us in the legendary forms of gnomes, trolls, elves, kobolds, poltergeists, goblins and the like. As such these pint-sized humans have a definite place in fantasy, of which science fiction is a part. It seems likely, to us at any rate, that they also have, or had until relatively recent times, a role in history as well.

We are basing this theory upon a number of definite historic facts that, taken together, tend to give reality to the legends.

Legends of the Trolls

The first of these facts is the widespread prevalence of the legends themselves. They extend, with local variations, throughout all of Europe north of the Alps and Pyrenees, from the Vistula to County Cork. Like the flood legends that have persisted the world over since even earlier times, their similarity must ultimately force the investigator to belief. So much smoke over so wide an area implies that at one time there must have been the fire of reality.

As a corollary comes the fact that such legends of the trolls are clustered most thickly about regions where Mediaeval and pre-Mediaeval peoples were most loath to settle—regions where living was far more difficult than in the fertile river valleys from which most of modern civilization sprang. Thus the Hartz Mountains and the Black Forest areas of Germany have more than their quota of litt-folk legends, as do the swamps of Brittany and the barren hills of Wales.

An undersized and primitive race, forced to exist in the same region with a larger species of vastly superior culture and artifacts, can only withdraw to such difficult places in its effort to survive—as witness the African pygmies, whose justified shyness kept them in the legend-category for thousands of years.

This corollary leads us directly to fact two—the isolation of most of Europe for tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years from the main currents of late prehistoric and early historic human development. The early civilizations seem to have grown up in more comfortable climes—those of Northern Africa, of Central, Eastern and Southern Asia, or Central and South America.

As a small and rather isolated peninsula of Asia most of Europe was forest wilderness, subject to bitter post-glacial winters and in general utterly unsuited for settlement by early civilized man. Such civilization dates only from early Roman times and it took Roman engineering ability to make it possible at all. Thus, in these regions, we have had a sort of accordioning of various cultures, one level coming so rapidly upon another that vestiges of undigested primitive levels have at least a possibility of survival beyond their allotted period in the vaster scheme of human development.

Miniature Monsters

Our third fact stems directly from the footnote to Suetonius that got us started. To the

(Continued on page 141)

BUILD A FINE BUSINESS FULL OR SPARE TIME!

Air Cooled

NEW NYLON MESH FAST-SELLER...

MAKE MONEY FROM THE FIRST HOUR!

FREE SELLING OUTFIT

SLIP ON— SLIP OFF!

Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping

THE SIGN OF VALUE!
Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal on Velvet-eez Air-Cushioned Insole shoes shows your customers they can't lose a dime! Send Coupon Today!

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Just Blow through this shoe! Popular, fast-selling Air-Cooled feature with Genuine Nylon Mesh brings you quick orders easy as ABC!

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BETTER THAN A RETAIL SHOE STORE OF YOUR OWN

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FOLLOW THIS MAN TO CASH!

"For the past four years, my average total weekly earnings have been around $80.00 per week—I couldn't have done it except for the liberal commissions paid by the company on this wonderful line of shoes and garments that really is above and beyond competition."

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Velvet-eez AIR CUSHION SELLS SHOES FAST!

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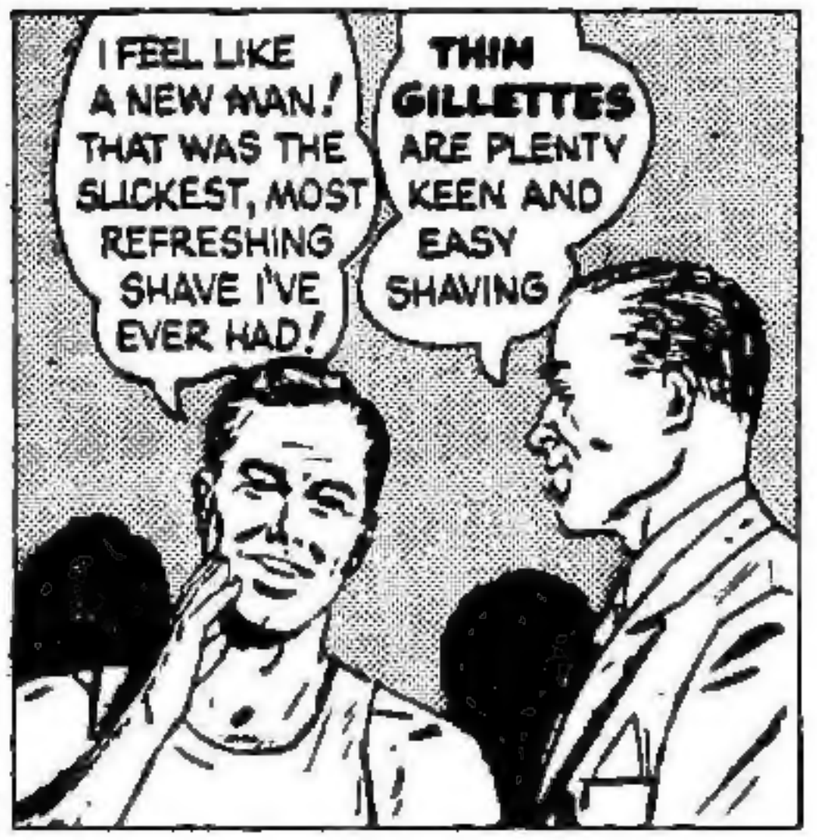
BILL BAKER, YOUNG LAWYER, FOUND A BRIEF CASE COMING HOME ON THE MIDNIGHT COMMUTING TRAIN AND NOW IT LOOKS LIKE HE HAS LOCATED THE OWNER...

AND THEN THE FEDERAL AGENTS ARRIVED...


I FEEL LIKE A NEW MAN! THAT WAS THE SLICKEST, MOST REFRESHING SHAVE I'VE EVER HAD!
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING

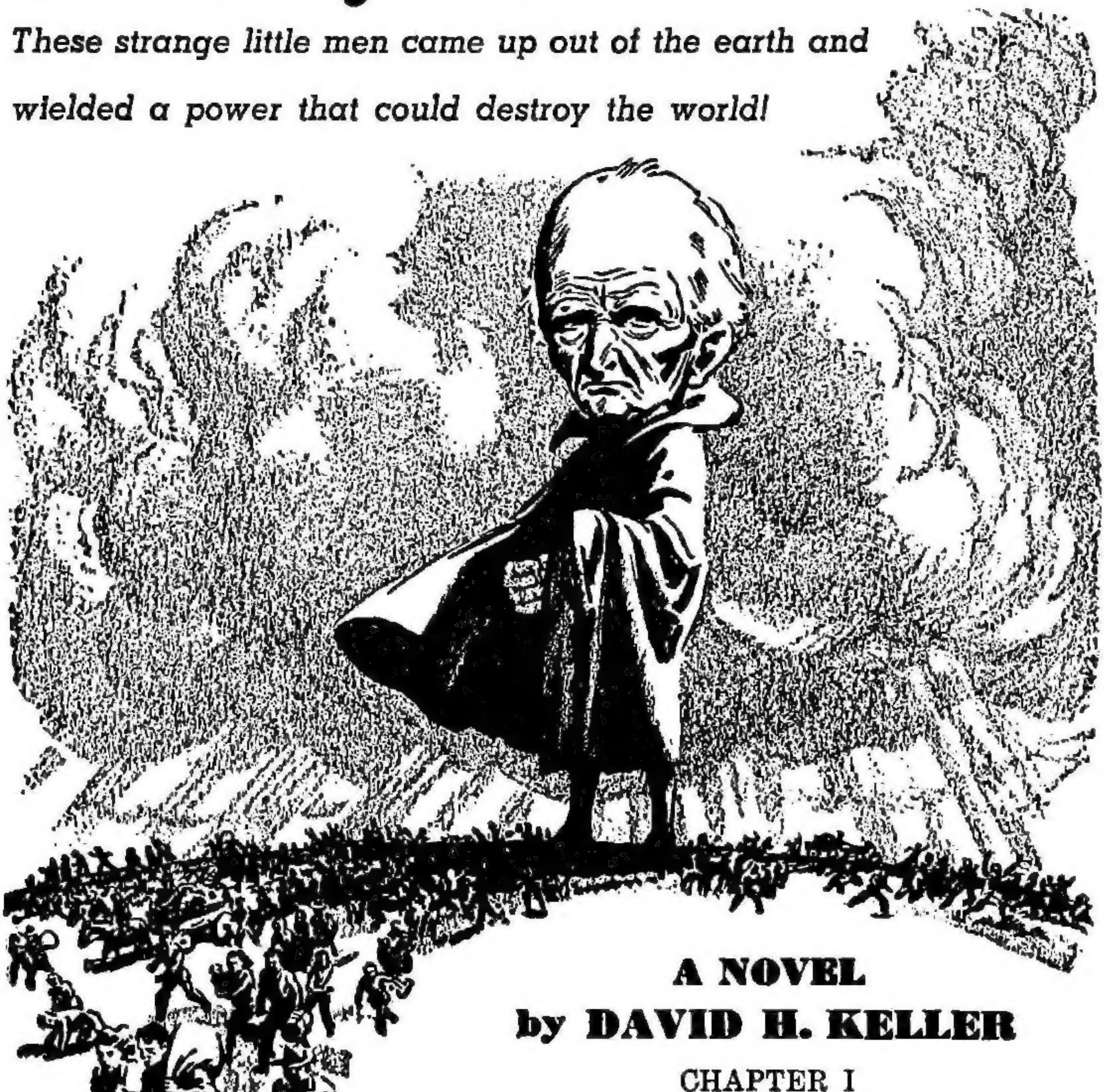
SO WHEN I SAW "URANIUM" AND "SECRET" ON THE PAPERS, I CALLED YOUR OFFICE FIRST
...AND NETTED US TWO DANGEROUS SPIES
HE HAS LOOKS, COURAGE AND INTELLIGENCE. WE NEED MEN LIKE HIM

ENJOY FAST, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING...USE THIN GILLETTES.
FAR KEENER AND LONGER LASTING THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADES, THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY AND ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SCRAPES AND NICKS. BUY THIN GILLETTES IN THE NEW 10-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT
THIN Gillette 10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

The CONQUERORS

These strange little men came up out of the earth and wielded a power that could destroy the world!



A NOVEL
by DAVID H. KELLER

CHAPTER I

First Message

"I SUPPOSE you noticed, Mallory, that the radio is out of commission?" said John Ormond to Mallory Wright, who nodded. The men, both bachelors, had become acquainted shortly after their arrival in New York—and the five years

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which they had spent in the metropolis had been made far more pleasant by this friendship. Mallory was an amateur of the sciences while John, though in reality a customer's man in a broker's office, dreamed of the time when he could become a hunter of large game.

It was a peculiar friendship, depending, as is so often the case, on a complete dissimilarity of tastes. Mallory Wright delighted in science. There was nothing in its many fields of which he did not know at least a little. Born in Philadelphia, raised and educated in the cities of the East, he had never knowingly killed anything except a few flies.

John Ormond, however, who had been raised in the country, enjoyed nothing so much as hunting or fishing. Deprived of much of this sport by his life in New York he had substituted for the reality a dream life of adventure, obtained from literature. He had gradually collected a rather complete assortment of rifles and spent both time and money in target shooting. Thus, he felt that he was prepared for any stroke of luck that might place big-game shooting in his way in the future.

Wright had persuaded his sport-loving friend to install a radio and, after a long period of tuition, had taught him to operate it. After having had it in his one-room apartment for three years the most that Ormond could say was that sometimes he could get the stations he wanted and sometimes he could not.

This particular evening, the sixteenth of March, 1933, was one of the times when not even a sputter emanated from the reproducer. Ormond, when his friend had made himself comfortable, went back to the radio question. "Do you think it is out of order again?" he asked.

THE scientist smiled rather dolefully as he replied, "It all depends on what you mean. Mine too is not working tonight. So far as I have been able to learn, neither is any receiving set in the city. There is an extra edition of the *Evening Sun*, featuring the fact that the city's radio service is dead."

"I thought your set was foolproof."

"It is," Wright replied. "Of course I have not had time to examine it carefully, but all the connections and tubes seem to be in perfect condition. I telephoned Hopkins—you know that long-haired chap who taught me all I know about radio? He says the same thing—his set is dead, yet he cannot find out what is wrong with it. He had phoned to several of his friends and they are all in the same fix."

"That pleases me." John grinned. "It's no news if a dog bites a man but if a man bites a dog that's different. I suppose, when there are two million radios going all the time in this city that is not considered news. But to have something happen that makes two million radios silent gets everybody excited and the papers print special editions."

"It really is a serious matter," said Mallory Wright gravely. "The city dweller has become dependent on his radio for his amusement and also for his education. There is nothing wrong at the transmitting stations and, so far as we have been able to determine, nothing wrong with the receiving sets. So the trouble must be in the air. For some reason the air is 'dead' as though it had refused to transmit the waves."

"Good! Then we'll have peace in this apartment house till the trouble is discovered."

"It looks that way. But I do not believe it will be for very long. Right at this minute, while you are wasting your time fooling with a gun that will never come within five thousand miles of an elephant, the greatest scientists of the country are working on the problem. Perhaps by tomorrow a solution will be reached. But it certainly is a peculiar situation."

That Threatened the Survival of Humanity?

Wright went over to the radio and carefully examined it. Ormond went on polishing the rifle. From the neighboring Cathedral chimes announced eight o'clock, the hour of the evening service. And, as the great bells ceased and the last echo died away, the radio reproducer started to emit sounds.

Wright moved rapidly to secure the proper amplification and, as the sounds came over more clearly, frowned deeply,

then started to take down the message. For, instead of music, or a voice, a message was coming in the International Morse Code.

At last the code message came to an end. Work as he would Wright was unable to revive the receiver. Once again it was "dead." He walked slowly over to the center table and sat down with his notebook under the lamp. For long minutes he sat there and then, taking his fountain pen and a piece of paper, started to transcribe the message.

At last Wright rose and, as though to shake off something, he strode over to the phone and called a number. His voice trembled as he spoke.

"Hullo, is that you. Hopkins? Yes! This is Mallory Wright. Did you get that message in code? I got it, too. Started to come over at exactly eight. Can you understand it? No, neither can I.

"What do you suppose? Think some one is trying to kid the whole country? Well, no doubt it will be in all the papers tomorrow. Whoever sent it also killed the air for six hours. Radio is doomed if that sort of thing is possible. I am going to spend the night here with my friend Ormand. You have his phone number? If you hear anything new let me know."

He turned to his friend. There was no doubt of his excitement. "Hopkins got the same message I did."

"Well, why shouldn't he?" Ormond yawned.

"You don't understand. Hundreds of radio fans in the city, and, for all we know, in the nation, working on their sets and trying to find out what made them go dead. Then, suddenly, at eight o'clock a message comes over in the International Code. Perhaps a thousand other radio hams in New York copied it."

Ormond gave the rifle a final loving rub and placed it back on the rack. Then he walked over to the center of the room, where Wright was looking at his notes.

"Here it is," said Wright. "Just listen to it!"

"Attention. Attention. This is the broadcast station of The Conquerors speaking. All airplanes are commanded to cease operating over the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina. All pilots disregarding this order do so at their own risk. Further orders will be given to the nations of the world from time to time—all orders being preceded and followed by a four-hour silence."

Said Ormond, "That is the work of a nut. The aviators of this country will pay no more attention to a message of that kind than they would to a command to fly to the Moon and bring back a peck of pickled peppers."

"Undoubtedly you are right," agreed Wright. "It sounds like the work of a lunatic. But there is no reason why a person cannot be insane and be powerful at the same time. Whoever is pulling this joke has the ability to kill the air for over four hours, then restore it just long enough to send this message, then kill it again.

"My personal opinion is that he is in earnest. The only other way to look at it is to consider it a clever advertising stunt. Suppose tomorrow one of the radio manufacturers comes out with definite proof that his machines were the only ones working during this silence? How about that? Of course, the government would give him the dickens for doing it; but think of the publicity he would have!"

"Oh, bosh! *Nightmares!* I get that way at times—dream I am shooting a tiger or thrusting a harpoon into a whale. Forget it and come with me for a glass of beer and a cheese sandwich."

"I'll come but I'm not going to forget it. Something has happened tonight that I feel is going to change the scientific life of this world."

"Fiddle-faddle! Shake yourself out of it! Let's eat and then go around to that new shooting gallery. You ought to practise more. You are positively the worst shot I ever saw."

"And you are the worst scientist."

So the two friends left the apartment to spend the rest of the evening together. Wright shot at innumerable clay ducks and missed most of them while Ormond amused himself with just breaking off their heads.

Meanwhile, the telegraph and telephone services of the nation were throbbing with frantic messages. From one side of the continent to the other all the scientific experts of the government and the great radio and engineering corporations were conferring with each other. And at the end of all the conferences the best that they could do was to admit that what had taken place during the past twelve hours was totally beyond their comprehension.

CHAPTER II

The Air Blockade

THE next morning every newspaper featured the story of the uncanny "killing of the air" and the peculiar message. Practically every large city in the nation had suffered the same interruption of radio service that had been so noticeable in New York City. There seemed to be an unanimous opinion that, in some way, a deranged scientist had obtained control of the "air."

But why he should try to stop travel by air over a few southern states or what he meant in calling himself by such a fantastic name as "The Conquerors" were mysteries that no one was able to solve. The government decided wisely or otherwise to ignore the entire affair so far as any open activity or official comment was concerned but under cover a dozen of the best operatives of the Secret Service were assigned to work on the case.

On the day following the publication of the message forbidding air travel over the five designated states aviators who had previously never thought of making an air journey in that portion of the country became convinced that only by disregarding the order could they be happy. Plane after plane from every part of the country was tuned up for the special trip.

Someone had thrown a challenge into the teeth of the finest sportsmen of the nation. The gauntlet was unhesitatingly picked up and before noon of the next day a thousand aces from outside the

forbidden territory were preparing to fly over it. That afternoon at least five hundred started.

At the end of another twenty-four hours two facts became widely known. Not a single plane which had attempted to rise from the ground in any of the five states had been able to do so. Not one motor of an airplane could be even started. And every plane which had started to fly from an outside state had been forced to land as soon as it reached the forbidden borders. In every case engine trouble of a peculiar and unusual nature caused a forced descent to earth. Fortunately there had been no fatalities.

Was America to be defeated by a single day of adversity? There were countless air pilots who did not know the meaning of the word defeat, who simply started to overhaul their airplanes and prepare for another flight. This time the attempt was semi-official. The government, at last conscious of a threatening danger, had asked the two greatest aces in the country to make the Washington-Richmond flight in a government plane.

A happy circumstance had placed Colonel Landry and Lieutenant Murphy in Washington together on the day when the challenge was hurled at the nation. Early the next day they were to take a government hydroplane and start from the Potomac basin. They were advised to attain an altitude of at least ten thousand feet, then turn south over Virginia. If they were able to reach Richmond they were to return at once to Washington.

This was the supreme test—a hydroplane running as perfectly as mechanical skill could tune it, with two of the greatest pilots that the country had ever developed. A start on the river and no effort made to cross to Virginia till a height of ten thousand feet was reached.

The start was perfect. The great mechanical seagull rose majestically in the air and became smaller and smaller as it circled over Washington, its white wings glittering in the sunlight. Then when it was almost a speck of dust it started south on its defiant flight.

The end came all too soon. Those on the ground who were watching through high-powered glasses and others, who had sensitive detectors listening for the sound of the motors, must have blanched when the seagull faltered and volplaned down, seeking safety on the open body of water.

"We have nothing to say," was the terse statement of Landry, as he stepped ashore. The two aviators took a government car and started back to the capital. Soon they were in conference with the Secretary of War, the head of the Air Service and several of the scientific leaders in the progress of American aviation. Colonel Landry, as spokesman for the two aces, made a short and pithy report.

"We had no trouble in leaving the water," he said. "The old boat acted just as fine as anyone could expect. We followed orders to the letter. The engine was going perfectly in every way. We watched the Potomac below and, a few seconds after we passed over the Virginia border, the engine stopped. We started to glide down through the air and by careful handling made the river again. I have no idea what happened but I do know that it never happened to me before."

"Have either of you any idea as to possible methods of investigation?" asked the Secretary of War.

The two aces could only look at each other.

BUT the next day at four P.M., Eastern Standard Time, radio communications ceased throughout the United States. Other nations, such as Mexico and Canada, were also affected. European countries could receive waves originating within their own boundaries but could neither send radio signals to North America nor receive from that part of the world.

The message came, promptly at eight, and this time the minds of the greatest men of America were focused on it. The President and his cabinet had gathered together. In Cambridge, Schenectady, New York, Pittsburgh and Washington, men who had become famous in the world of electrical research gathered to help each other to the instant solution of any problem that might arise. Then the message came, again in International Code.

A radio expert took it down as it came, and read it to the President and his official advisors:

"Attention. Attention. This is the broadcast station of The Conquerors speaking. Our former order in regard to airplanes has been disregarded. If this continues we will be forced to kill all pilots trying to use the restricted territory and also suspend all use of electric power in these states."

The President of the United States and his cabinet listened quietly as this message was read to them. As the radio expert ceased speaking a hush, a stillness as of death, fell over the group of men assembled around the table in the executive office.

At last the President said, "Gentlemen, it seems that the nation is faced with an unknown danger from an unseen enemy. We have first been prohibited the free use of the air over five of our states. Our effort to defy this order has resulted in the threat of death to any of our pilots and a most peculiar statement that all use of power may be prevented in these five states. I think that we ought to communicate with the governors of these five states and assure them that the entire resources of the nation are at their command.

"Then we should at once offer a reward for the apprehension of the person or persons responsible, or for informa-

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In the incubator room, surplus females are sorted out

tion that will make it possible. I believe it should be at least a million dollars. If you have no objection I will request the five governors to issue a joint proclamation, offering such a reward and, if the time comes when it is claimed, we will ask that it be repaid by congressional appropriation."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by an urgent message for the Secretary of War. He read it with interest and then asked for the attention of the cabinet.

"This is serious news, gentlemen," he said. "It seems that Colonel Landry and Lieutenant Murphy returned at once to Newport News after they made their verbal report to me and had their seaplane overhauled. Immediately after this second message came they went to the hydroplane and started out over the ocean, determined to prove to the world

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they were not afraid of the threat of an insane criminal.

"When they turned back and were well over the land their gas tanks exploded and they dropped to their deaths in flames. This message informing me of the deaths was telephoned by the commanding officer at Newport News. It seems as though the threat was more than an idle boast."

"It may have been a mere coincidence," commented the Secretary of the Interior.

"I hardly think so," said the President. "I think that these are only the first of our casualties."

The next day seven aviators died, trying to fly over the forbidden territory. But this was not the greatest calamity to strike the five states—for every piece of machinery operated by or dependent for its power on electricity ceased to operate. The blow came at six in the morning and left thousands of automobiles stalled, made hundreds of manufacturing plants idle.

There was a great deal of confusion but little congestion even in the large cities. There still remained steam power and in the mountain regions water power. But wherever the steam or the water was used to generate electricity it was uselessly operated.

UP to this time the masses in the United States and even in the five states so drastically affected had looked upon the messages and the show of potential power as simply a peculiar form of joke. Aviation, though making tremendous strides, was still looked on as being in the experimental stage.

But when the automobile owners of five states suddenly found at six in the morning that they could not drive their cars, when millions of people were unable to use the telephone, telegraph or electric light, when practically no manufacturing plant in five states could start up because its electrically-driven machinery would not operate—then the "joke" was no longer pleasant.

There were annoyance and confusion but no panic. The morning papers, printed around midnight, had come out as usual. It was apparent that unless some change took place the afternoon papers could not be issued. The joint proclamation, offering one million dollars reward for the arrest, or information leading to the arrest of the criminals, was printed in Washington and rushed by train to the five states for distribution. It was printed in every newspaper throughout the nation.

Within twenty-four hours five thousand communications had been received by the several governors, explaining exactly what had taken place and who was responsible for it. Exactly one hundred percent of these letters were written by cranks. Subsequent developments showed that the offer of a million dollars reward had only added to the work and worry of the governors and had not helped in any way to the final solution of the mystery.

Meanwhile in New York Mallory Wright and John Ormond spent the larger part of their spare time talking over the affairs of the nation. They were both interested in the idea of a million dollars as the reward for clever detective work.

"I could go elephant hunting on much less!" exclaimed Ormond. "We would go together. You could study the reason why there is so much fever or lightning or so many bugs in Africa or anything else your scientific mind requires for its amusement—and I will see that any wild animal who tries to eat you is promptly killed. All we have to do to make the dream come true is to find this guy who is raising so much trouble down South and turn him over to the Government."

"That's all," replied Wright. "But how shall we go about it?"

"That's easy. Everybody else has failed because he has thought of the average ordinary things of life in connection with radio or the automobile or airplane. Now with me it's different. I'm not a scientist. All I'm supposed to

do is to point a gun accurately and pull the trigger and get my game. So I don't have to look at this in a scientific manner.

"For example, I can say that the Chinese know they can never conquer us by coming over the sea—so they have bored a tunnel through the earth and need these five states to place their camps on. Does that entitle me to the million? I can think up solutions like that as fast as I can talk but there's just one thing wrong with them."

"And what is that?" asked Mallory Wright wearily.

"They are not the right solutions."

That nation waited anxiously for something new to happen. It seemed impossible that this second message should be the last. There had been no resumption of electrical power in the five states. Manufacturing interests were working twenty-four hours a day in the endeavor to make use of steam in some way. Horses, mules and bicycles were pressed into service to replace the useless automobiles.

People met each other on the street and, instead of the usual question concerning health, asked, "When is it going to end?"

The President of the United States felt the entire situation keenly. He realized that the citizens of the five restricted states were suffering while those in the rest of the states were being only occasionally annoyed by interruption of their radio service. He had thought that the reward of a million dollars would bring almost immediate results. As the days passed without any successful solution of the mystery he became more and more disturbed.

Troops were in readiness at every strategic point—but what use were marines or soldiers where there was no visible enemy to fight? There was only one thing to do and that was to wait—and waiting under such circumstances was hard, even for a man with the greatest patience.

For over a week no aviator had crashed—for the simple reason that none had tried to fly over the threatened territory. For eight days business in the five states had been at a standstill. During each of these eight days the President had tried every possible avenue that would show even a chance of successfully solving the puzzle. And at the end of the week and one day all that he could say was that he was still working.

On the eighth evening his private secretary was called to the phone. It seemed that the person at the other end wanted to see the President that evening at midnight. The secretary explained in dignified but cold language that such an appointment was impossible. He was told that it must be made possible. The secretary hung up the receiver.

In three minutes he was again called to the phone. This time his language was less formal and decidedly warmer. The third time he swore. The President, who was passing into the secretary's office at the moment, asked what was the matter and the secretary related what had happened.

"Allow me to answer him if he calls again," ordered the President. "I don't like to be brusque in turning down a man who is as insistent as that. He may be able to tell me something of importance to the nation."

The telephone rang again; it was the same voice. The speaker wished to see the President at midnight. He had selected that time because he thought that it would be most inconspicuous and his business was of a very confidential nature. Who was he? That would be brought out later on but for the present enough to say that he was an ambassador. Of what country? He would tell that later also. Could he come? Good! He would be there at twelve; he would simply say to the secretary, "I am the expected ambassador."

The President turned to his secretary. "That man will be here at twelve. Wait in the outer office. He will say, 'I am the expected ambassador,' and you will admit him to my private office. After

that you may go. I will show him out."

"How about the Secret Service, Sir?"

"I do not want them. I have a feeling that this man is not an assassin. I want you to follow out these instructions to the letter."

At twelve exactly the visitor arrived. He seemed to be a miniature man, hardly larger than a child, with a large head, receding chin, bulging forehead and tiny limbs. A large cape covered most of his body and a peculiarly-shaped hat, which he impudently kept on his head, hid most of his face.

At least, it was difficult for the President to give an adequate description of that face the next day to the Surgeon-General. When the visitor sat down in a chair his feet did not come within six inches of the floor. The first impression that he made on the President was that of some harmless crank, escaped from a dime museum.

CHAPTER III

A Midnight Conference

HE SPOKE English but with a peculiar accent. It was perfect English, almost *too* perfect. There was something mechanical about it.

"I presume you are the expected 'ambassador?' " asked the President, as he gravely bade his guest be seated.

"I am," was the reply. "I represent the people called, for lack of a better name, 'The Conquerors.' "

"I suspected that. The time of your visit, the secrecy you demanded, everything pointed to the fact that you were in some way connected with the people who call themselves by this peculiar name."

"I will not discuss with you the appropriateness of our name," the little man said with freezing dignity. "I am not here for the sake of debate. The situation, briefly stated, is this—it is necessary for our logical development to have undisputed possession of that part of this country you call Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina.

"We want the people now living in those five states to move out within three months. We recognize that a nation as populous and proud as the United States will not agree to such a request without evidence on our part that we are able to enforce it. We have amply demonstrated our power. Do you mind turning the shade a little? My eyes are weak and the light bothers them—that's better."

The President finally laughed, a little nervously, then checked himself and resumed the gravity that seemed appropriate for the occasion.

"You will have to admit that this is a most unusual request to make of the head of a country that has a citizenship of nearly one hundred and forty million people."

"That is a matter of the point of view. You are yourself an unusual man, at least far above the averge American—so you can realize that I do not speak idly. You will set the date?"

"We cannot do it!" exclaimed the President. "In the territory you ask us to abandon is Mount Vernon, the home of our first President and it also holds the sacred ashes of the Unknown Soldier. If for no other reasons these two would be sufficient to make us, as a people, fight to the last man and the last dollar."

"You speak strangely," said the visitor as though rebuking a child. "You say it is your land but a short time ago you expelled from it the Indians. They took it from the Mound Builders and the Mound Builders took it from others. What is the ownership of the land? Power, and that is all. We have never before cared for this land, because we did not need it. We need the land now, however. Therefore we ask you to vacate it."

The President strove to control his

anger. "You imply that the people you represent, wherever they are and whoever they may be, are vastly superior to us in intelligence."

"We are," was the astonishing reply. "We are as superior to your race as you are above the ape or the gorilla."

The President laughed heartily this time. "Now I perceive this is all a huge joke."

"As proof of my statement," continued the little man calmly, "I will simply say that we have studied your language and are able to talk to you. Whereas up to the present time you have been absolutely unable to begin to talk to a monkey. We have learned your code and addressed you over the radio—but I am wasting my time. Will your people get out of these five states willingly or must we drive them out by force?"

"You had better give us a little time. It will be necessary for me to confer with my advisers and perhaps the entire question should be presented to Congress. Suppose you put your demands in writing?"

"All of which means," commented the little stranger, "that you refuse to believe what I have told you. According to your psychology, I am a crank or I am insane. No, I will not place the demands in writing. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Eastern Standard Time, on April 10th, twelve days hence, electric service within the designated area will be resumed for an hour and a half.

"Now, I am going. I took the liberty of parking my air machine on your lawn. Goodnight. I am pleased to see that you made no effort to stop me. That would have resulted only in many deaths among your people."

He slipped down out of the chair and stood on the floor. The President later recalled that only his head appeared above the level of the top of the library table. Then, without further words, the uncanny visitor walked out of the room.

IN A few minutes the President had the Chief of the Secret Service Department in his office for a conference.

"I have just had a caller, Mr. Hopegood," began the President, "and before I forget the details I want to give you his description." He did so, concluded, "We want that man. He may be a harmless lunatic yet, under present conditions, he is a great menace to the country. Find him and we have the secret of the trouble.

"Then I want you to send a personal messenger to each of the five governors of the states which have been attacked, with this message—'The President wants to see you at once!' Make it urgent. They are to meet here in Washington as soon as they can get here. That is an 11."

It was four days before the five governors were able to meet the President and these were four days of anxiety for the Chief Executive. The request of the visitor was so fantastic, so absurd that it was impossible for the President to tell anyone about it till the time came for him to divulge the entire matter to

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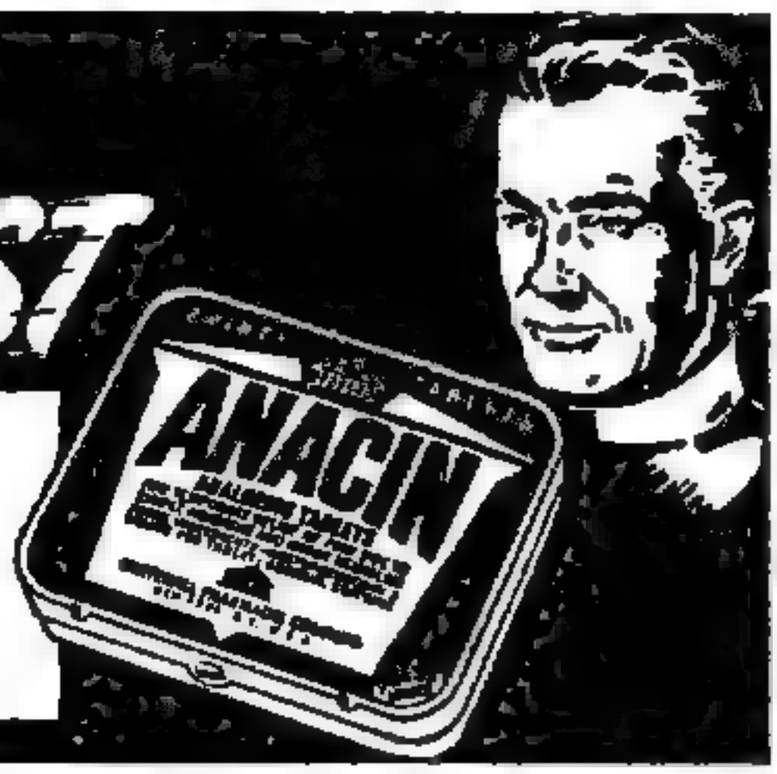

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the five leaders of the threatened commonwealths.

"Gentlemen," he said and there was a gravity in his voice that amply showed the pressure and mental distress under which he labored, "I have summoned you here to confer with me on a matter of the greatest importance. It is unnecessary for me to tell you about the peculiar happenings of the last few days. The people or persons back of these attacks on your commonwealths call themselves 'The Conquerors.'

"I have asked you to confer with me over a new development of this affair. I have been in communication with one of these people and he conveyed to me a demand that is so singular and peculiar in every way that I felt I could give no answer till I had taken the five of you into my confidence.

"The demand is that we evacuate the five states within three months—that means we are to remove all of the present population and leave the territory entirely in the control of these people. I told him, the man who called himself an 'Ambassador,' that such a demand was most unusual. He simply said that he presumed we would leave quietly rather than be forcibly ejected.

"At the present time his request seems to be the grandiose gesture of a paranoiac, who believes he has unlimited power. But we must remember that so far he has made every threat good. We shall have, eight days hence, a test of his power, to demonstrate that the strange phenomena are under his control. What is your advice, Governor Bawlding—suppose you start the discussion!"

Bawlding of Virgina stood up. He was one of the few old-time politicians who had retained his power in spite of the great shift in party management. In his frock coat, his low wing collar and polka-dot tie, he made an impressive figure. He forgot that he was addresing five men, and put power sufficient to captivate thousands in his reply.

"My State, Virginia, is rightly called 'The Mother of Presidents.' Always she has led in the march of progress, humanities and republicanism. Her soil is still hallowed by the graves of the Revolutionary heroes and the Founding Fathers and cemented by the blood of the devoted brothers, North and South, who perished there in the great War Between the States. We have never yielded to force a foot of soil.

"There is only one answer I can make for my state and that is *we stay!*"

HE SAT down. The other four governors spoke—but all they could do was to repeat, with emphasis on matters of state pride, the defiance of the Virginian.

At last the President replied. "We will do nothing," he said. "That is, practically nothing until April tenth. The Secret Service will in the meantime devote their full strength to the problem. It is possible for the Secretary of War to call sufficient reserves to increase the strength of the regular army by fifty thousand men—so that, at any time you need help I will be able to send you adequate forces.

"In the meantime I think that we six had better keep this entire meeting a secret. I am sure that we can depend on the courageous cooperation of the entire country with the population of your five states—but I do not want to start a panic. If thousands should start to leave at one time there would be a great deal of suffering. I feel that we should simply wait and make these 'Conquerors' show their hands. Keep in touch with me, gentlemen, and consider that the entire resources of the nation are at your disposal."

The conference had hardly ended when the Surgeon-General called at the White House and asked for an interview with the President. This was at once granted.

"After your talk with me a few days ago," the Surgeon-General said, "I at once started my hunt for a hydrocephalic dwarf. I have located over thirty

who seem to be very similar to the man you described to me. I have a list of all of them, their residences and occupations, and it will not be difficult for the Secret Service to investigate them.

"Unfortunately for the theory which has been presented more than two-thirds of them are inmates of institutions for the feeble-minded or insane and the other third are harmless individuals. Not one of them seems to have the required ability to work the slightest part of the damage done in the five affected states."

"What did you say is the name of the disease?" asked the puzzled President.

"I called them hydrocephalic dwarfs. The deformity is caused by a great increase of fluid within the skull and, as a result, the head enlarges, out of proportion to the rest of the body."

"And you think that this man who called on me belongs in that class?"

"It seems so, according to your description."

"Then I think that we had better identify every case which exists in the United States and place them all under closest observation—because this man, if he has the power he pretends to, has already been the cause of great suffering and financial loss that cannot at this time be estimated. It appears absurd to think that one man can work such havoc."

"Perhaps there is more than one?"

"You find that out and you will be worth a million dollars!" exclaimed the President.

CHAPTER IV

An Unfortunate Shot

AMONG six men, at least, in the nation the approach of the 10th of April produced a state of acute mental tension. If the dwarf should prove himself to be a member of "The Conquerors" by restoring electric service in the states for an hour and a half, then it was almost certain that "The Conquerors'" threats might be made good.

At three o'clock great shouts went up in the cities of the stricken states. All electrical equipment was found to operate as if nothing had happenend. And for an hour and a half the people rejoiced, believing their troubles to be over.

Their consternation was great, however, when at precisely four-thirty the electrical equipment was stopped again and activity in those states ceased as suddenly as it had resumed. A hush of despair swept over their population.

And in six executive offices six men sat back in their executive chairs with the weariness of defeat marking their faces.

On the twentieth of April the "ambassador" again called over the telephone, asking for another conference with the President. This time there was no delay. It was to be held, like the first, at midnight.

But at this meeting all arrangements were in readiness for the capture of the "ambassador." The President was at last persuaded that he must be placed under control and force used to make him tell his secret and give the necessary information concerning his fellow conspirators, if any.

The Surgeon-General was instructed to be at the White House, also the Superintendent of the government's Hospital for the Insane, in Washington. A dozen men from the Secret Service were hidden in the room and adjoining offices and a squad of marines was at hand, prepared to answer any calls made on them.

The grounds also were guarded, as a determined effort was to be made to capture the airplane or automobile in which the visitor would come. However, this part of the plan was a failure since the dwarf walked to the front gate of the White House grounds. Here he simply announced himself as the "am-

bassador" who had an appointment to call on the President at midnight.

As before he walked calmly into the office where the President was waiting for him. Without salutation or introduction of any kind he began, "Have you set a date for the evacuation?"

"I have not. We are going to stay. What are you going to do about it?"

"*Make* them leave! There is no desire on our part to kill large masses of people. We hoped that your intelligence would be sufficient to make you realize that you are opposed by a force superior in every way to your own. You should reconsider the matter. "

"No! Our answer is final. And we want you to stay here with us. We are going to examine you. There is a doubt in our mind about your mental health."

The stranger laughed. It was a peculiar unearthly laugh.

"You will have to excuse that attempt at laughter," he said. "None of our race has laughed for centuries. Well, I must be going. I am sorry—"

The President stepped toward him. As he did so the "ambassador" raised his right hand in what seemed a menacing gesture. A shot rang out and the little fellow dropped to the floor.

"Who did that?" exclaimed the President sternly. "The last thing we wanted to do was to hurt this man."

"I did it," said one of the Secret Service agents. "I thought he was going to shoot you and I shot first."

Immediately the two doctors present started to examine the wounded man. A moment's examination was sufficient to show that he was badly hurt but still conscious. He simply looked at the men around him. His cape off, his clothing opened to the bare chest, he looked pitifully childlike.

Examination showed that he had been shot near the heart (the autopsy later was to confirm this) but the liquid pouring from the wound was not red. It was of a peculiar pink, milky consistency. The Surgeon-General commented on this fact.

The dying man looked at him. "The ichor of the gods!" he exclaimed. He looked intently at the President and whispered, "Fools! Fools!" His form relaxed. He was dead!

"Too bad—too bad," sighed the President: "A useless killing. Not only that but his information dies with him. At least make a thorough search of his clothing. Perhaps he may have some papers on him that will lead to an identification. I think an autopsy is in order.

"Also I feel that this affair must be kept from the newspapers. It will be worth while, gentlemen, to make another check of your list of hydrocephalics in the United States. If one is missing, it may be this man; and that may furnish us a clue as to his identity."

THE commands were carried out by the Secret Service. In two days they were able to report that all of the known hydrocephalic dwarfs were alive and in their usual locations. This was before the report of the pathologists who were making the unusually protracted autopsy. Had the Secret Service waited for that report, they would have realized the uselessness of any search for the identification of the dead "ambassador" as an American resident.

The report, written in ultra-scientific language, was read to the President and his cabinet by Dr. Howell, head of the pathological department of Johns Hopkins University, who had been asked by the Surgeon-General to perform a complete autopsy. The President listened patiently to the end of the report, then asked, "Will you please tell us just what this means?"

"It means simply this, gentlemen. The stranger who looked like a hydrocephalic dwarf was really *not* a deformed human being. The autopsy showed definite evidence that what we thought at first were deformities are in his case normalities. *He was not a human being, such as we are!*

"His blood is different. It is pink in-

stead of red and the cellular composition shows differences. His respiratory system, in proportion to his weight, is at least twice the size of the average man's while there is a compensatory shrinking in all his abdominal organs. In fact, his organs of digestion are greatly different from ours. Much simpler in a way, and this may have been more efficient, though we do not know just what his food consisted of.

"His brain is very large. It was not a case of hydrocephalus; but an increase in actual brain tissue which gave him a brain twice as heavy as that of the well-educated man of today. The feet are very small, the muscles of his legs almost shrunken. Yet his hands are very large and the muscles of his fingers highly developed.

"We have not received a final report from the miscroscopist but it is evident that the nervous system connected with the eyes is very highly organized. The lower jaw is small, the teeth almost missing. This does not mean that they had fallen out but rather that he never had many. There are practically no organs of sex."

"Certainly a most peculiar being," commented the President, "How do you scientists explain it?"

"I hesitate to tell you. That very matter of explanation has given us all the gretatest concern since the first minute of the autopsy. This is our final conclusion and I am not asking you to believe it in any way.

"For years the anthropologists have felt that the human race has been changing. This man, who was killed in your office is probably an example of what our race will be like a hundred thousand years from now. Certain changes in human anatomy which we have felt to be taking place, very slowly at the present time, appear to have already taken place in his body."

"But was there only one of them?" asked the President.

"Who can tell? Perhaps a million," was the startling answer.

The President was not a scientist and certainly not an anthropoligist. But he had sufficient general education to see the point of the Surgeon-General's explanation of the findings of the autopsy. They were, however, so far as he was concerned, just one thing less to worry about.

Late that afternoon he had received a long-distance telephone message from Governor Johnson of North Carolina to the effect that automobile transpórtation had suddenly been resumed and that all of the manufacturing plants dependent upon electricity had been able to start.

The telephones and telegraph were working normally and, to make a long story short, things were normal in North Carolina. Soon after a similar message came from West Virginia and within an hour the President had received satisfactory messages from all five of the threatened states.

That seemed to solve the problem. Evidently the little dwarf, who called himself the "ambassador" from "The Conquerors," was the sole being responsible for the changes that had caused so much disturbance to the nation. With his death the entire structure had toppled and the menace was removed.

The President regretted his death. It would have been much more satisfactory if the stranger had been captured and questioned.

BUT now that everything was normal again perhaps it was better that the man was dead. Certainly the Secret Service operative was not to blame. In acting as he had he thought that he was saving the President's life, since he had been unable to see clearly just what the man had in his hand.

The next afternoon at four radio service throughout the United States was again interrupted—presumably as a signal that, at eight that night, another message would come through the air. That was, to say the least, very disturb-

ing to the President, as well as those who were in his confidence.

A personal interview with an "ambassador" could be completely hidden from the public. But a radio message in the International Code became at once the property of every newspaper and through them of every reader of the daily press.

As before the President and his cabinet met to receive the message. Promptly on the stroke of eight the code words came tripping through the air. This time the message was longer than before. At last it came to an end and the radio expert who had transcribed it read it slowly and distinctly to the waiting audience.

"Attention. Attention. This is the broadcast station of The Conquerors speaking. The United States, having disregarded our efforts for a peaceful compromise and having killed our ambassador, has created a state of war. We have permitted the resumption of all electrical power in the five affected states, so that their citizens will have ample means of vacating these lands. Our advice is that they do so at once. Signed, The Conquerors."

Such was the message that was broadcast to all parts of the United States. It was impossible to keep news of such importance from the nation. All editors agreed that something should be done—but none gave any indication of just what they considered that "something" was.

The governors of the five states stood firm. All of them issued proclamations, acknowledging the demand to vacate the land, making vague reference to the source of that demand, and leaving it to each family to decide for itself what it wanted to do.

Every effort was to be made to assist those families who wished to leave but who were unable to do so on account of their impoverished financial condition. The Red Cross offered to help. The National Government set aside a hundred million dollars to cover the emergency. The New England states suggested that their abandoned farms serve as shelter for those who wished to continue a rural life.

A small part of the population moved—the greater number stayed. For a while nothing happened.

Then came the mist.

It arose first in West Virginia and at the end of four days simply covered that state with a blanket of fog. It was a heavy, thick, almost impenetrable, blanket of dampness. And with it came semi-darkness. Everything became wet and uncomfortable. Houses, clothing, bedding, furniture, woodwork—all gathered great drops of precipitated moisture.

Life was difficult under such conditions. It seemed hard to breathe. It was impossible to keep dry. Fires in the houses seemed only to make the humidity worse.

From the mountain tops of the state it seemed that all of West Virginia was covered with an ocean of fog, great billowing waves of mist. The level crept higher and higher till the misty ocean overflowed into Virginia, following in great tidal waves the valley of the Potomac and cloaking everything in its gray ugliness. Parts of Maryland were covered. Westward the waves of mist rushed over Tennessee and Kentucky. In less than two weeks the five states and considerable acreage in the adjoining states were completely covered by the heavy wet mantle.

AND that was all! The Government issued bulletins which indicated that as soon as the wind changed the mist would disappear. It was nothing to be alarmed at. That was all well enough for the experts at Washington to say—but it did not sound so very well to the persons who had been living for three weeks in an atmosphere of dark wet gloom.

There was some fog in the District of Columbia, and at times the cloud of mist extended across the river at Memphis, but, as a general rule, only the five states were affected. To add to the distress of the inhabitants everything

started to decay. Houses, furniture, bedding, clothing, food supplies, tools, all seemed literally to rot away. Everything became hard to handle and unpleasant to smell.

Food in abundance was provided by the Red Cross but it soon mildewed and became unfit for use. Metals seemed to rust away as easily as wood or leather decayed. Under this double strain the courage of the people began to crack.

So they began to leave! On foot and in covered wagons and in automobiles of every vintage they took with them their household goods or at least such as were not completely rotted and seemed worth saving.

The state governments did their best to encourage the people to stay in their homes. It was believed that the worst was over and that the mist would soon rise. But by this time no one wanted to believe such news. The residents of these states had been through six, seven, eight weeks of the mist and that was enough.

IT WAS expected that of all the people in the five states the mountain folk would be the last to leave. For over six generations they had clung to their mountains, looking with disdain on the valley and river folk. What was weather to them? They were accustomed to living out of doors.

But they were not accustomed to fog and mist and a continual cold dampness in the summertime and when this curse descended on them, word was passed from mouth to mouth that the world was near the end and that the mountains were to be cast into the sea. That was Bible! That was the prophecy! When that happened they did not want to be on the heaving mountains. Better be with the rest of their kith and kin.

So the city dwellers, the people accustomed to the discomfort of the crowded beehives, remained in their habitations longer than the mountaineers. But eventually they also left. The states were losing their population by thousands each day. The exodus was on.

Two months passed and then three. The mist grew heavier, if that were possible—but there were now no observers of its devasting effects. Vegetation grew rampant. Ferns, vines, weeds of all description pushed their tall stalks upward. Trees that were young made rapid growth. Old trees decayed and fell as rapidly. Wooden houses almost melted away into their cellars. Structures of brick, stone or cement became covered with mildew and vines that penetrated every crack as though endeavoring to tear the building to pieces with their long fingers.

Railroad tracks rotted and rusted. The long white strips of concrete road became covered with moss. In the cities, abandoned skyscrapers thrust their lofty towers to a sky that no longer carried larks or threw down sunshine to strutting pigeons.

Now and then a government observer would make a hurried trip through a special part of the doomed land. One of these men spent three days in Memphis. In his report to the Governor of Tennessee, he said among other things:

> I feel that the city of Memphis is doomed. Of course there is a possibility that if the mist clears at once and sufficient funds can be obtained something can be done to restore it to its former greatness. However half of the residential section is already so rotten that it would be dangerous to resume living in the houses. All the business section would require such extensive repair that it is a question as to whether it would not be cheaper to tear everything down and build anew from the ground up.
>
> The amount of insect and reptilian life is astonishing. It is almost impossible to walk without stepping on a small toad or lizard. Flies and mosquitoes make life almost unbearable. And any food left for a few moments becomes covered with white ants.
>
> There are a few cats and dogs in the city. The dogs are ferocious because of the lack of food and they all seem to be in a sickly state.
>
> I do not believe that such animals can survive the climate. During the three days I spent in going over the city I failed to find a single person. The city is without life, absolutely deserted. If the fog keeps up for a year, it is reasonable to believe that the city will rot to the ground.

At the end of six months the fog and mist were still clinging like a living death over the deserted states. The nation had calmly accepted the condition as inevitable and all the resources of the republic were being used to help the fugitives adjust themselves to life in new surroundings. All talk of resistance had stopped.

Exactly six months after the appearance of the mist another message came over the radio. This one was short and absolutely clear on its meaning. In International Code it proclaimed its threat:

"Attention. Attention! This is the broadcast station of The Conquerors speaking. Now that you are out, stay out!"

That made many a red-blooded American angry. But what reply could be made?

CHAPTER V

The Mist Clears

THE mist lasted exactly one year. At the end of that time, it started to clear and in another month atmospheric conditions over the five desolate states were the same as they had been prior to its appearance. Once again the sun shone into the valleys and illuminated the mountains with splendor. The full moon flooded the river valleys and hilltops with silver.

Everything above the earth was the same—only on the ground was there any difference.

The earth everywhere was covered with moss or sunk in slime, the slime of death and decay. Little towns had disappeared. Cities were falling apart. All of the works of man were dropping back into the dust from which they sprang.

Reptiles again ruled the land after a lapse of millions of years.

Since the final message to "stay out," the land had been silent. That message had been given wide distribution throughout the nation. There was now no doubt in the minds of the leaders of the United States that, whoever "The Conquerors" were, they had in their possession certain scientific powers by which they could enforce their will.

But the nation as a whole could not forget that every inch of the abandoned territory had once been gained at the cost of human life. Now, in a little over a year, five great commonwealths had been abandoned to an unseen and unknown enemy. At the end of that time, the mist had gone as mysteriously as it had come. The five states were now ready for re-occupancy. But there was the threat—"Now that you are out, stay out!"

The President requested the five governors, who still retained nominal office in spite of the fact that they had no people to rule, to issue proclamations, urging the former populaces of the five states not to make any immediate effort to came back to their homes.

On the same day the President called a special session of Congress to consider the ways and means for the rehabilitation of these ruined states. Secretly, he was afraid that Congress would decide to reoccupy the abandoned territory. He felt that such a course would only cause future disturbances, the gravity of which he was unable even to imagine.

In spite of the efforts of the governors several people went back into the forbidden territory. They simply went in and disappeared. Nothing more was heard from them. One group of scientists not only were well equipped with radio transmitters and receivers but also took with them, on spools, many miles of electric wire for telephone service. They also disappeared and sent back no messages. These apparent disasters made the President feel only more keenly the dangers of hasty action in settling the rehabilitation problem.

Congress met. There were patriotic speeches in unusual number. A Tennessean, known among his friends as "The Black Bull" rose in the House of Representatives and, by a flight of oratory, almost threw that body into a condition of hysteria. Cheers followed his statement that he himself would leave the house at once and personally lead the mountaineers back to their humble homes. Tears flowed freely as he declared that, only under the soil of his native state, could he rest happy till the trumpet called him to appear before the Great White Throne.

After it was all over a representative from West Virginia took him to one side and asked him when they could start back home. The Tennessean sadly said that he would like to go at once but that his business affairs in New York City demanded his presence there for an indefinite period.

AT LAST Congress appointed a joint committee from both houses, with full authority to act, appropriated a billion dollars for the relief of the expatriates, canceled the long-unclaimed reward and adjourned. The committee met, organized and adjourned to meet again in three months. It was a beautiful example of the efficiency of republican government.

All this time the world had been watching the unusual course of events with the greatest interest. Several of the nations had attached to the staffs of their legations scientists who had no other function than to write full accounts of the peculiar and unheard-of cataclysm that had fallen, in such an interesting, even though terrible manner, on this nation.

As the Surgeon-General of the United States entered his office one day after lunch, he was handed a card. It bore only the name:

HARRY BRUNTON

The Surgeon-General searched the

[Turn page]

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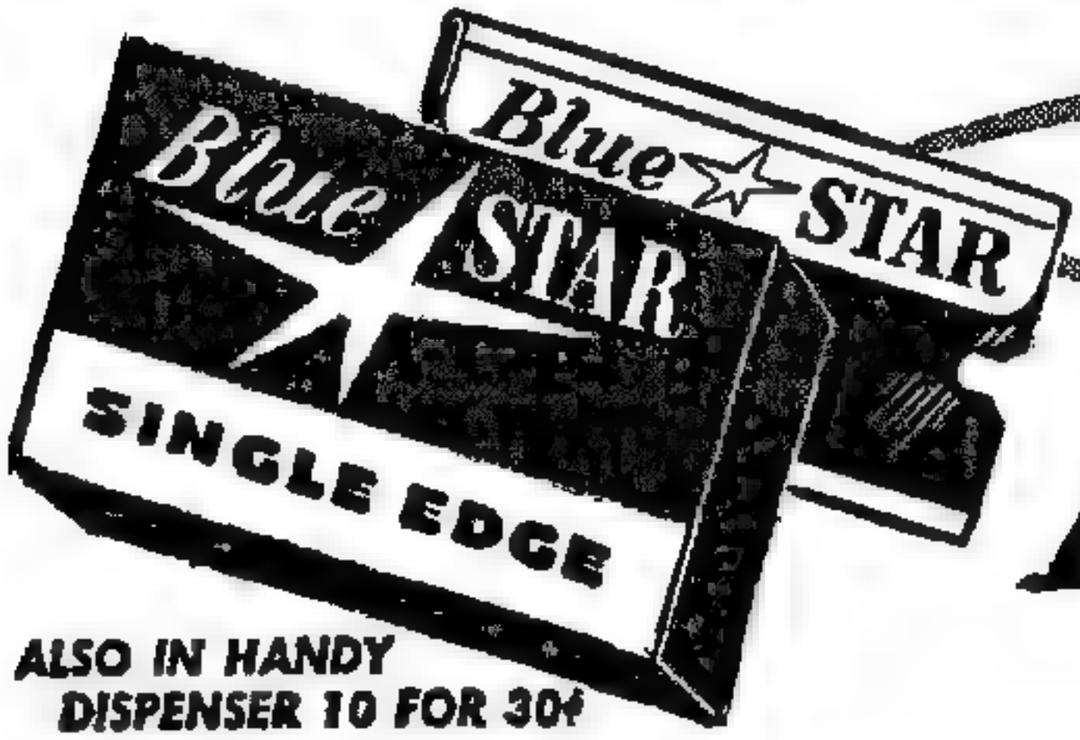

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files of his memory and quickly identified the name with that of a famous English anthropologist.

"Show Sir Harry into my office," he instructed the aide. The latter withdrew for an instant, and returned, escorting a bronzed man of middle age, whose rugged though not unpleasing features were stamped with the distinction of their wearer.

"Sit down, Sir Harry," said the Surgeon-General, greeting the distinguished scientist and explorer. "My time is my own for but a few minutes this afternoon—but it will be a pleasure to learn in what way I may be of service to you."

"My errand," returned the Englishman, "while scientific, is none the less—confidentially—official. This letter from the Prime Minister will vouch for the fact that I am here on behalf of His Britannic Majesty's Government."

"But, my dear sir! If you have a letter like that, you should have gone at once to the President. All important visitors —you know—just a matter of courtesy. Let me telephone and make an appointment for you."

"I have seen him. He asked me to give you this note."

The Surgeon-General tore open the envelope and read in the President's characteristic scrawl, the words:

Dear Bill, I do not know what Sir Harry wants but we have a direct request from the Premier to give him any help in our power. Use your own judgment, but do not embarrass him in any way.

Yours, Charles.

The Surgeon-General laughed, tore up the note and turned to his visitor as he said, "The President and I went through preparatory school together. He then studied engineering and I medicine. Naturally, we are still close friends and at times his notes to me are anything but diplomatic. Now I am at your service, Sir Harry. What can I do for you?"

"Simply this. Some time ago a mysterious man called on the President and was accidentally killed by a Secret Service man. Am I correct in this statement?"

"Perfectly—though the truth is known to only a few persons."

"After his death an autopsy was performed by Dr. Howell of Baltimore and the results of that examination were reported to the President. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely."

"What I desire is your permission to read the report of the autopsy and, if the bones were preserved, to examine the skeleton."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly. Our government feels that there must be a definite connection between that body and the very remarkable series of natural phenomena that have been taking place in the east-central part of your southern states."

"But, my dear sir—the things that have taken place in the United States are strictly the business of the United States."

"Of course. But you will realize the situation if we should be threatened with similar events in our Empire."

"That is true," agreed the Surgeon-General, "I have one of the three copies of that report in my safe; I will let you see it and you may copy any portion of it that you wish. I will also give you a letter of introduction to Dr. Howell. He has, I believe, preserved parts of the body for further study."

HE went over to a strong safe, opened it, took out the report and handed it to the English visitor, with the suggestion that Sir Harry make himself comfortable and put as much time on it as was necessary.

For the next two hours his visitor read and reread the report. At last he arose and handed the sheaf of papers to the Surgeon-General with the simple remark, "By Jove!"

"Odd, isn't it?" asked the American.

"It certainly is. My word! Thank you a thousand times for the courtesy. Now I must travel on to Baltimore. May I have a letter to the man who made this report?"

"I have it ready for you. But I was in hopes that you could dine with me."

"Fine of you to ask me but my time seems to be limited. I will let you send me over in a car. however, and—what say—will you wire over and make an appointment?"

"I'll do that. Howell is a fine chap. By the way! There is something more that might be of interest to you. When that man was shot I commented on the peculiar appearance of the blood. He looked up at me and said, 'The ichor of the gods!' Soon after that he said, 'Fools. Fools!' before he died.

"Ichor, as you of course know better than I, is originally the blood that flowed through the veins of the mythological gods. You read the report of the man's blood. It looked more like pink lemonade than the blood of a human being. I thought you might be interested in that detail."

"Interested? My word! And this man actually called on your President and talked to him?"

"He certainly did. Here is something else—he told the President the first night that his people are as far above the human race in intelligence as we are above the apes. He said that he had learned to talk our language whereas, so far, we could not talk to the apes. That was some argument, wasn't it?"

"It certainly was."

That evening Sir Harry Brunton called on Professor Howell. The professor had suggested that it would be best to meet at the pathological department of the university. The reception accorded the Englishman was a warm one. Dr. Howell, who knew of the man and the wonderful work that he had done in anthropology, was more than glad to talk over the case with him.

"It is a real treat to show you this case, sir," he said. "There are so many features of it that make me realize my own scientific deficiencies. I know what I see in this skeleton and I believe my description of the body is as accurate as any man could have made it –but I do not understand what it all means."

"Let me get to work," was the only request made by the Englishman.

At midnight Dr. Howell served coffee and sandwiches. At five in the morning he served a light breakfast. At ten that morning the Englishman started to walk around the room.

"You people made a serious mistake in killing this man. Dead, his body offers a thousand questions that, living, he might have answered. I am sure of one thing, however—there is not a single evidence of degeneracy here. This is a human being who has gone upward, not downward, from man as we know him today. There is nothing in past ages that will answer these questions. The solution lies in the ages to come. Now I want to know one thing. Have you any more beings like this in America? I mean live ones?"

The American smiled. "Not that we know of. Won't you stay and visit the University? Our classes would be delighted to have you lecture to them."

"No time. This thing is bigger than formal lectures to students. Sorry. Must be going. You'll hear from me again."

CHAPTER VI

An Unusual Advertisement

MALLORY Wright, in a hurry as usual, rushed into the apartment of his friend, John Ormond. "Say, John," he cried, "didn't you tell me you were born and raised in western Tennessee?"

"I sure was born there," laughed Ormond, who as usual was cleaning a rifle. "Right in the Reelfoot Lake region. Been there yet, only I had to make a

living someway—so I came East and got that job in a broker's office."

"Good! Here is an advertisement I bet you are the only man in the city who can answer. Listen!

"Wanted at once. American scientist who knows how to shoot and is acquainted with the region of Tennessee around Reelfoot Lake. Apply in person only at the British Consulate tomorrow at three p. m. Good opening for person qualified."

Ormond looked up in disgust. "You know what kind of a scientist I am—just about able to tell an atom from an Adam's apple."

"You don't get me at all, John," insisted Wright. "You are not going to answer that advertisement."

"No?"

"*We* are. *We* have what the man at the Consulate wants. *We* know all about the lake.

"*We* can shoot and I am willing to match my general knowledge of science with anyone of my age in the city. Things are not going very well in the laboratory and I quit today. It is hard to work with a man who knows less than you do.

"So I am out of a job and I know how long you will stay with that brokerage if you have a chance to shoot. Let's rush around there tomorrow afternoon and be the first in line—only I am sure that there will not be much of a line."

"It's a deal!" shouted Ormond, putting the rifle back in the rack. Then his face clouded again. "But what's the use. This guy don't want to go to Tennessee—all he is going to want is a lot of information. Besides, no one can go there. The government says so."

"Let's see what they want anyway."

The next day they were at the British Consulate an hour early. They looked around the waiting room anxiously but it was empty. It was still empty at three. They walked over to a clerk and stated that they had come in answer to a certain advertisement. They were told that they would be interviewed at once. In a few minutes they were taken into a private office.

"One at a time, gentlemen," said the middle-aged man, sitting at a desk.

"We are both applying for the same position, sir," said Wright.

"But I only want one man."

"We know that—but together we have the necessary qualifications. Separately we won't do at all. So it's both of us or none."

"That's odd. Was there anyone else out there, wanting the position?"

"There did not seem to be."

"Perhaps you will do. Which of you knows the Reelfoot Lake region?"

"I do," said Ormond. "I was raised on the west shore of the lake. I have hunted and fished a lot over it and I can shoot. I would rather shoot than eat, and I like to eat."

"I presume that you are not a scientist?"

"Not at all—but my friend is. He knows a little about everything when it comes to that sort of thing. Our idea was to take the position on one salary."

The Englishman lit a cigarette and looked into space. At last he gave his decision. "I believe that you will do. At least it will be worth the trial. Suppose you come around to my hotel tonight and I will tell you just what I have in mind. How about salary?"

"Is it a position or a job?" asked Ormond. "A position pays about a hundred a month—while a good job is worth at least fifty or sixty a week."

"If that is the case we had better call it a job and put the wages at one hundred a week for the two of you with all expenses."

THE two friends left the consulate in a jubilant mood. Once out on the sidewalk Mallory said, "He has asked us to have dinner with him at his hotel. What are we supposed to wear?"

"Why, the very best we have."

"But is that good enough?"

"Certainly it is. That old boy is a

real sport. Didn't you hear him say that he wanted people to call him plain Brunton?"

"Yes, he said that—but perhaps only to make us feel good. I am going to beat it for the library and see who he really is. I suppose you are going back to dress?"

"Not on your life! I'm going to spend a little while polishing my guns."

At seven-thirty Mallory Wright called for his friend. In spite of all his talk about polishing guns Ormand was clean-shaven and faultlessly dressed in a well-cut tuxedo.

"I have found out about our new boss," exclaimed Wright. "You had better not call him Brunton. He is one of the most noted anthropologists in the world. His work in Asia was so remarkable that they made him a knight, so he has a 'Sir' in front of his name. The article I read stated that he is wealthy enough to finance all of his own explorations. I'll say he is a real man. This is going to give me a chance to learn something about anthropology."

"Listen to me, Mallory," said Ormond, grabbing his friend by the shoulder. "What does the word 'anthropo—' something mean?"

"It is the study of man and his culture at various stages of his development."

"You mean a study of dead men?"

"To some extent. Come on and let's beat it for the hotel."

Rather to their surprise, when they inquired at the desk for Sir Harry Brunton and were ushered up to his rooms, they found him clad in old sport clothes and smoking an even older pipe. He was rather amused to see their dress.

"I thought we would dine up here," he explained. "My word—but you gentlemen put on a lot of side. Now that you have shown me that you have such good clothes, suppose you take off your jackets and make yourselves comfortable. I want to talk to you about our trip in private."

It was not till after the meal had been cleared away and the door locked that the Englishman started his explanation. "I ought to tell you, gentlemen, that I am here as a personal representative of our Foreign Office. Over in London we have been rather disturbed at the way things were going here in the States. At times it seemed to be a world problem rather than merely a local one.

"When I was in Asia hunting bones a few years ago I ran into a Valley of Mist. I wanted to look into it but the natives became panicky and the first thing I knew they had me tied to a pony —they never let me go till we were some hundred miles away. I never could learn just what they were afraid of. But that mist, as I saw it down in the valley, was rather like the description of the mist that caused so much trouble for your people.

"That might have been mere coincidence. But I have found that there is very little in life that happens by chance—almost everything has a reason back of it. Therefore I felt that the same reason was back of both of these natural phenomena. My government has asked me to come over and investigate and I have been doing a little since landing.

"Perhaps you have heard of the man who was shot in the President's office? No? Well, it makes no difference, but he was an odd little thing and I was able to obtain some very interesting information in Washington. What I want to do is to go to Tennessee and see if I cannot find some more men like him.

"Perhaps you know that there used to be a lot of activity in the mountains of the Appalachian Range—I mean earthquakes and volcanoes and the like. Not lately but millions of years ago. Still having little earthquakes but mostly the range is considered a dead one. Then, after a long period of inactivity there was a sudden earthquake in Tennessee in eighteen-hundred eleven. A lot of the land just dropped and formed Reelfoot Lake, eighteen miles long and three

miles wide and no one knows how deep in places. Everything dropped, prairies, swamps and forests. Is that correct, Mr. Ormond?"

"That is what my father's grandfather said. He was just a boy when it happened and they came to the Reelfoot country not long after."

"Did he have any idea of what caused the trouble?"

"No, not anything more than the rest. As far as we local folks knew, it was just an earthquake."

"There has been another explanation lately," added Mallory Wright. "I took the time to look it up in the library this afternoon. All that region is undermined and honeycombed with enormous caves. There may have been an earthquake but what happened was this—the roof of some of those caves got too thin and dropped, and the hole just filled up with seepage from the Mississippi River."

SAID Brunton, "That is good, Mr. Wright. And that is what happened though even that does not tell all that I want to know. Anyway, I want to go to that lake and for just one reason. I think that somewhere near there we will find traces of other men like this poor fellow who was killed, of the men who are in back of this messy business."

"You mean 'The Conquerors'? exclaimed Wright.

"That is what I mean."

"Do you know the danger?"

"What danger?"

"Didn't you hear the last message—'Now that you are out, stay out?' I understand that all who have gone in since then have been killed."

"Hardly. What we know is this—those who have gone in have not come out again. They have not been heard from. That does not mean they are dead, does it?"

"Why—no—not exactly. They might be—"

"My word! You worked it out for yourself. They might be detained there as prisoners. Anyway the three of us are going in—just the three of us. We are going to sneak in through the back door. I have studied the map rather carefully and my plan is this—we will go to Missouri, change into some old clothes, buy a rowboat and cross the river so that we will land near a little old town called Tiptonville. As far as I can make it out on the map that is between the river and the lake. Do you know the town, Mr. Ormond?"

"Hells bells, yes! I was born there."

"Fine! You will be right at home."

"Just one minute," interrupted Wright. "Once we are at Tiptonville what are we going to do? What *can* we do, just the three of us?"

"I have not the least idea," answered the Englishman. "I have been in Tiptonvilles all over the world and I never know what is going to happen or the part that I am to play in events till I get there. So far I have always been able to get back to London. I feel that we are up against bigger game than I have ever hunted before but that does not make me change my mind."

"By big game do you mean elephants?" asked Ormond.

"Not exactly. Now, as to the part we are going to take in preparing for this trip. We will each of us take the clothes we wear and enough condensed food to last two weeks. A gun and a brace of revolvers for each for us might be of use. You can suit yourselves about being armed. And I believe that is all."

"No scientific instruments?" asked Wright.

"Absolutely none. I have an idea that we will find scientific equipment that will make our instruments of precision look like children's playthings."

"May I ask just one more question, Sir Harry?" said Wright.

"Certainly."

"Why do you want a scientist and a hunter along with you if you are not going to take any instruments and will not even go armed yourself?"

"For this reason. If we both come

back I want a scientist to support my story. If I die you will have the intelligence to tell the world what happened. As for our friend, Ormond, every once in a while I have found it a good idea to have a man in the party who can shoot straight to the mark. I never shoot except as a last resort but when it has to be done it is very important that the bullet land in the right place. Suppose you lads leave me now. We have much to prepare to leave New York tomorrow."

The very next day the party of three —Sir Harry Brunton, Mallory Wright and John Ormond -left New York for Chicago. There the Englishman spent a few hours between trains, talking with a fellow anthropologist. Several hours later found them in Cairo, Illinois.

There they went to a hotel and when they left it, by the back door, they looked rather like average rivermen. John Ormond had made many suggestions in regard to their clothing and it was he who insisted that they remain in seclusion in their hotel room till they had grown a three days' beard.

Sir Harry protested. "I have been all over the world," he exclaimed, "and I have never missed my daily shave."

"You cannot do that and look like my home folks," insisted Ormond. "Some of them never shave, just cut it off once a year with a scissors and use it to stuff their bedticks with. You said you wanted to go to Reelfoot Lake, looking as though you were an old inhabitant coming back for Old Home Week. You can't because you're too intelligent looking, even with a three-day beard on. But you can't shave every day, not around Reelfoot, sir."

From Cairo they went via Lilbourn to New Madrid, where they slept at a cheap hotel on the riverbank. The next night they started to row down the river.

"This here old Mississippi River is a funny old thing," explained Ormond. "Sometimes it is asleep and then at other times it raises hell. We will row across and at the same time let the current carry us and by the time we land on the Tennessee shore we'll be just making Tiptonville, for breakfast.

"Ever read 'Tom Sawyer,' Mr. Brunton? Oh, the devil! I just can't get the hang of calling you Harry. Tom used to do a lot of work on this old river, and he saved Becky when they were lost in a limestone cave. Twain knew a lot about this region."

Sir Harry stopped long enough to light his pipe, then he picked up the oars again. The three men were taking turns rowing. At last his shift was up and he gave the oars to Wright and started to talk.

"It might interest you to know that I once spent a whole day in that Tom Sawyer cave. Of course it is very small, compared with many others. I like to go through a large cave, Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, for example—there is a cave we know practically nothing about.

"There's a new one down in your great Southwest, another in Virginia. The entire subject has been only partly studied. Men spend years in Arctic explorations while, if they could only be made to realize it, there are just as interesting opportunities right under their feet. Of course, you know the cave was the first home of mankind?"

"I thought the trees were," said Wright, who was beginning to puff from his unusual exertion at the oars.

"You are right as far as man's ancestors were concerned but just as soon as he came out of the trees, he hunted shelter and safety in the caves of the earth. I am going to go to sleep. Wake me when it is my turn to row."

CHAPTER VII

Brunton's Hypothesis

THEY reached the shores of Tennessee just as day was breaking and pulled their boat up on the bank.

"I think it might be best to sit here for a few minutes," explained Sir Harry. "There are some matters that I want to talk to you about. First I want to ask Ormond a question. Is there any part of Reelfoot Lake that is unexplored or that has been shunned by the hunters and fishermen who lived around here?"

"Yes, there is—but how did you know 'about it?"

"Simply by doing a little thinking. I made up my mind that there ought to be such a place. Now tell us about it."

"Not much to tell. It seems that this lake we are going to, old Reelfoot, was formed overnight. After it was all over those who settled round the lake didn't come too close because they never could tell when it would start sinking again.

"But the trappers and fishermen and happy-go-luckies, they saw that there would be lots of easy food and good trapping and they decided to take a chance. Land did not belong to anyone special then, any more than it does now. I suppose the proper name for most of the people would be squatters. Give them a pipe, some salt pork, flour, tobacco, a rifle and fishing pole, and they were happy for life!

"But right from the first they were leery of the entire north end of the lake. That was a long time ago and it's hard to tell just how the idea started. But the way it was told me was that men went up there and never came back—and at last it was just naturally felt it wasn't healthy to hang around there.

"Last time I was home visiting I tried to hire some of the best trappers to row me up there and they turned me down flat. But they wouldn't give any reason. I suppose that for over a hundred years there have been parts of that lake which were never visited by any man, white or black."

"And you know where those parts are?"

"Certainly! More than once when I was a boy my pa thrashed me for just bragging that I was going to go there."

"Then that is the part of the lake we are going to. How about a boat?"

"Have to make one, I guess, unless we find a cedar one that hasn't rotted under the mist."

"Any snakes?"

ORMOND grimaced before answering.

"Lots of them. Some called cottonmouths. Big around as your arm and deadly poison."

"Do you think that we had better row up the lake or walk along the shore till we get opposite this unknown part?"

"I don't see how we could walk along the shore. Most of the lake hasn't got a real shore—just swamps and quicksand and deep mudholes. Right at Tiptonville the ground is a little high and dry. If we can get any kind of a boat I'd feel a lot safer on the water than I would trying to walk around the shore."

"That sounds sensible. Now, gentlemen, this is what I have on my mind—I feel that the world is threatened by these people who call themselves 'The Conquerors.' I think that this is just a name that they have taken from our vocabulary because it has a certain impressiveness. They think that by using that word they can scare our race.

"This attack on this section of the States is probably the beginning of an effort to destroy the human race. The time will come when either these unknowns or the peoples we represent will have to disappear. Since they first started to send their messages I have tried to imagine where they are, how many of them exist, just what kind of a social order they form. The so-called 'ambassador' told the President that they are as far above us in their power as we are above the ape. That is a rather horrible to contemplate if it is true.

"I desired to locate them, somewhere on this earth. Most of the earth's surface is rather well known, though of course there are some spots that are imperfectly mapped. Certainly these people could live neither in the sky nor under the water. There is just one place left

and that is under the earth—cave dwellers.

"Now, follow my argument—because it is important that we all understand each other. The first message forbade planes from crossing over the territory of five states. Why? There are parts of these five states that are practically inaccessible to the foot of man—but a man in an airplane can see everything.

"The United States was planning to to make an air survey of its entire territory. For some reason these strange people did not want it done. So they issued an order forbidding all flights over this territory. They not only refused to allow flights but they made flights impossible.

"Then, as though this were not enough, they determined to have undisputed occupancy of the five states. In making this demand their 'ambassador' was killed. They at once started to drive the inhabitants out with a mist. That mist was like the one I saw in Asia, where people had a deadly fear of it.

"Now, to the east of us is Reelfoot Lake, which was formed overnight in eighteen-hundred eleven. For some reason the squatters, who were afraid of neither God nor the Devil, were afraid of the upper end of that lake. They were still afraid of it when the mist came and they had to leave.

"If they came back they would be doubly fearful. Why? Things happened after the lake formed and something fearful was stamped into the minds of the people—a deep conviction that, up at that end of the lake, there is something that had best be left alone.

"The three of us are going up there—if necessary we are going to live there for a while. I want you to remember that only rarely, in handling people of unusual intelligence, is it necessary to shoot. If you do shoot—do so as fast as you can and shoot to kill. But remember that the great factor of safety is to keep cool. No matter what happens do not show any surprise. All in

[*Turn page*]

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the day's work. Is my meaning clear?"

"Do I understand that you are actually going up there to meet these people?" asked Wright.

"Certainly. And I hope that they will find us and make us prisoners. That is one reason why I am not going armed. Lots of this trouble might have been avoided if that ambassador had not been shot."

"Perhaps it may be necessary to do a little shooting," commented Ormond hopefully. "A shame to bring this big elephant gun along and not get a chance to use it. And I brought along a fine Winchester for Mallory. Aren't you even going to carry a revolver, Sir Harry?"

"Yes, I think I shall. It would be handy in case we meet one of those cottonmouths and I could use it on you if you call me 'Sir Harry' again. What say we eat a little breakfast?"

IT WAS a silent breakfast—not a silence of depression or even of apprehension but due to the fact that all three of them felt that they were going into an unknown country to face conditions that were perhaps unprecedented in the history of mankind. Theirs was the tension of the runner just before the race, the breathlessness of the soldier a few minutes before the zero hour.

After fighting their way through the underbrush of the river front, they at last reached a roadway. Walking was hard, for the moss on the road was in many places over six inches high. At the same time it was better in the road than on the sides. The vegetation was profuse and almost matted on the fields.

"What do you think of those weeds, Wright?" asked Sir Harry.

"They are the tallest I ever saw. Over there is something that looks like bluegrass but it must be at least twelve feet high. And there is golden rod, nearly as high, and some asters with blossoms six inches in diameter. This moss is new to me. How did it ever get a start like this on a hard road?"

"I think that this is all easily explained. Remember the mist—for a year this country was dripping wet all the time. There was no sunshine but there was lots of water. Now there is sunshine and, no doubt, the ground is still soaked. And then it is hot here, almost tropical—exactly ninety while we were eating breakfast.

"Heat, sunshine, water are three partners that are able to make anything grow. I must admit, however, that this moss is peculiar. It seems to have a specific rotting influence on the road. Perhaps it was planted here for that purpose to destroy the road as soon as possible."

"At least there is one thing to be thankful for," added Ormond, "and that is that we decided not to pack much of a load. I was born down here, where men never made mules of themselves. Hope we will find a boat."

"Why not throw aside that elephant gun?" asked Sir Harry. "That weighs almost as much as all the rest of your load."

"I would rather throw away the flour and bacon. Might need that gun."

Though the actual distance they walked was only a few miles, it was well past noon before they came to deserted Tiptonville. Ormond silently led the way through the silent street, lined with houses in all states of dissolution. At last he came to a central square.

There he put down his gun, threw his pack off his shoulders and announced, "This is Tiptonville. Shall we have dinner?"

"Not yet," answered Sir Harry. "Better go down to the lake shore."

A few minutes' walk took them there. Ormond looked around in astonishment.

"Doesn't look like it did," he said. "I know what's the matter—it's those weeds. Here is the old boat landing all right, and we used to be able to see a lot of clear water in front of us. It was deep a hundred yards offshore. Even if we build a boat we'll have to cut down those cat-tails to get to the water."

"I don't think that we shall have to build a boat!" exclaimed Wright. "My eyes must be sharper than yours. There is a boat waiting for us—over to the left. See it?"

Ormond started over but Sir Harry called him back. "Wait a minute, my lad. My word! How impetuous you Americans are. Could have saved many lives in the last war if you had been willing to wait a minute. We eat now."

Ormond came back, crestfallen.

"I thought you wanted a boat—and now there *is* one you won't even go and look at it."

Sir Harry never replied to that but merely started in to do his share toward preparing a meal. It was not till the meal was finished and the pipes lit that he started to talk.

"I want you to listen to me. This game we are playing is a sporting proposition though so far we do not know all the rules. But there is one rule that I want to impress on you. From now on, whenever you run up against anything unusual, walk around it three times and keep as still as you can. Then go off and think it over before you take definite action.

"We know there are not supposed to be any human beings around here. All one has to do is to walk through this town and see for himself that the place is deserted—not even a cat. Everything dead and decaying and even a macadamized road disintegrating. The lake by the shore is a mass of water weeds. Any boat left here a year ago would have rotted and sunk in the mist. Yet, here is a boat.

"Did you look at that boat? I did and this is what I saw about it. It is tied to a tree and the rope looks as though it were new. Not only has the boat been painted and varnished, it has had all the brass work polished. It shines in the sunlight.

"By the shape of it, as I see from here, it is a power boat. It certainly is not a rowboat or a canoe or dugout of any kind. I didn't intend to be in too great a hurry in regard to that boat. My word! Do you lads know what I think?"

Ormond replied that he did not have the slightest idea but Wright answered almost eagerly, "You have an idea that this boat was put there for our use?"

"That's a bright lad, Mallory," replied the elder man kindly. "There is only one way to look at that boat and that is to feel that it was put there for our use. Now suppose we follow that line of reasoning—if it was put there for such a purpose the parties who did so knew one thing."

"What was that?" asked Ormond.

"Simply that we were going to come here. They knew that we were headed for Tiptonville. If they knew that, there is a likelihood they knew our plans in New York City. There is something to think about and there is only one possible alternative—that the whole thing is simply a peculiar coincidence. Yet such coincidences are rare in my experience. Suppose we take our things over there, pull it up to shore and take a close look at it?"

WHICH they did—at least they made as careful an examination of the boat as they could without actually touching it. There was no doubt about its being new and behind it was a narrow channel, cut through the weeds to clear water. There were no oars but at the stern, there was something not unlike a small gas engine. Sir Harry turned at last to Ormond.

"What do you think of it, Ormond? You are the sportsman of the party."

For once Ormond deliberated before giving an answer. After ten minutes he gave his opinion.

"That is the most peculiar motor I ever saw. Looks like a gasoline engine but it is different. I cannot see how a man could run it. There is a propeller there and of course the engine, whatever kind it is, makes the boat go. But it does not look right to me."

"Think you could start it?"

"I could try."

"What is your advice, Wright?"

"We understand the boat part and we could make poles or oars. I'm in favor of throwing the rest of the equipment on shore."

"Under ordinary circumstances I would agree with you. I made up my mind a little while ago about that boat. If it was sent here to take care of us—then, just as soon as we are in it and start the motor, we shall be taken just where those people want us to go."

"You mean that it is controlled by radio?" asked Wright. By this time he was more than interested.

"My word! You saw through it. Ten years ago that would have had us guessing. But the robot is rather overworked by this time. I think that the idea is to have us sit down in the boat and start it—and then we will be carried automatically to our destination on a radio beam or something like that. Suppose we turn the boat around, start the engine and let it go chugging out to the lake without any passengers? It will be interesting to see what happens."

Acting on this suggestion the three men pulled the boat to the shore and, after a good deal of trouble, started the engine. Off the boat went. The water lane, cut through the mass of weeds, pointed straight out to a body of clear water. Sir Harry followed its course through his binoculars.

"Just as I expected," he finally whispered, almost to himself. Then, putting his glasses away, he looked to the two Americans.

"They turned the boat around out there and now it is on its way back. In some way the people at the head of this business found out that there is no one in the boat. Clever—my word! No name for it. Mallory, tie the boat up and we will decide on the next step."

The anthropologist made himself comfortable, covered his face with his hat and apparently went to sleep. At the end of an hour Sir Harry took off his hat and started to talk.

"Just three things to do, my lads. We have to make a choice. Either get in the boat and let them decide where we land, take the machinery out and row, or pole the boat or make a boat of our own. What do you think?"

"You decide that, Sir Harry," suggested Ormond.

"Not at all. Wright, how do you look at it?"

"I suppose you think that 'The Conquerors' are back of this, sir?"

"Who else could it be?"

"For the sake of argument let's suppose it is. So far, they have shown no disposition to be bloodthirsty. Of course they drove everyone out with the mist but they did not kill the people. I am sure it would have been as easy to have killed everyone as not.

"Now they must be expecting us—or at least everything looks that way. They want us to come to them since, for some reason, they cannot come to us—or don't want to. This looks to me like a test of some kind. I think we ought to get in that boat, start it and see what happens."

Sir Harry reached over and slapped Wright approvingly between the shouldeds. "Bravo, Mallory, old chap! That was just the conclusion I had reached but I wanted you to do some independent thinking. Our sending the boat out to the lake without passengers has shown them that we realize the danger—while our going in it when it starts the second time will show that we are willing to face that danger, no matter what it may be. So, if it suits you two, suppose we start out on the trip?"

CHAPTER VIII

The Brakes Off

THE party did not have much baggage—consequently, it did not take long to put their possessions in the boat. Then the little craft was turned around

and pointed to the open water. With the three adventurers aboard, it started on the journey into an unknown future.

For five miles the boat went up the lake, at times through clear water and at others through narrow channels, twisting and winding so that it was hard to be certain of the points of the compass. All that the three men had to do was to sit still. The propeller steadily drove the boat forward in silence while an unseen electrical hand steered its course.

Ormand watched it all with steadily growing admiration. "I'll have to hand it to the guy that is doing this!" he finally exclaimed. "He couldn't do better if he was an old swamper. This here is the worst part of the lake!"

Sir Harry tapped Ormond's knee to secure his attention. Then he whispered gently, "Just as soon as we reach the part of the lake which nobody wanted to explore or fish I want you to give me a signal. Must be something there to interest us."

"Will do," replied the sportsman. "Any objection to my looking over the gun?"

"Forget that you have one. Watch for landmarks; does anything look familiar to you?"

"In places. We're nearly there. That's what I've been looking for—that tall pine to the right. Pine on right side and little hill on the left, 'Run a line between them,' my pa used to say, 'and if I catch you going past that line I'll whale the life out of you, provided you come home alive, which I doubt.' "

"My word! How odd! Nobody here since eighteen-hundred eleven. Perhaps we have the explanation for it there."

He took the glass and gazed steadily up the lake. Then he handed it to Wright. "Looks like a mound or a low crater, right in the middle of the lake with clear water all around it," he remarked. "That corresponds with everything else. Things do not just *happen* in the natural world—they develop.

"It may take a year or ten million years, but it is never spontaneous. Of course, the mist appeared at first to be unprecedented but I have seen the same sort of thing in Asia. When we reach the solution we will probably find that the mist in Asia and the mist in North America were both caused by the same natural forces. If that be true, back of these same forces we will find the same intelligence possessed by the same human beings.

"I call them human beings, because I do not know any more suitable name. That poor chap they killed and dissected in Washington was certainly a man. He was different from ourselves—but what else was he if not a human being?"

As he was talking the boat increased its speed and rapidly approached the edge of the crater. Nearing this they saw that it rose about twenty feet above the water level. The boat headed for a landing, from which ascended a series of steps to the top of the crater's rim. It slid gently into a close-fitting berth cut out of the hard clay. The motor stopped. "Here we are!" cried Ormond.

"What shall we do now?" asked Wright.

"Let's wait and see what the program is," suggested Sir Harry.

They did not have to wait long. Down the steps came a small peculiarly-shaped man.

"Am I right in assuming that you are Sir Harry Brunton?" he asked in a near-English accent, yet one that to the Oxford-bred Brunton had a rather artificial ring.

"That is my name, sir," was the Englishman's reply.

"And these men are your servants?"

"Hardly that. They are my companions. Allow me to introduce Mr. Mallory Wright, a scientist of no mean attainments, and his friend, Mr. John Ormond, a financier of New York City, who is noted for his ability as a hunter of big game."

The stranger merely glanced at the two men, then turned again to the Englishman. "You are the one we are ex-

pecting, Sir Harry. We will allow the other two to return to Tiptonville and live there. Of course they cannot leave this area."

"They have no desire to do so. The three of us stay together. It is flattering to know that you expected me to visit you—but I cannot think of asking my friends to miss the pleasure of the trip after they have come so far. Shall we disembark?"

"No. You will stay in the boat until I find out about these men." And saving that, he turned around, went up the steps and disappeared.

BRUNTON motioned to the two to draw close to him. He whispered, "That is a twin of the man they shot at the White House. Look at the hydrocephalic head, the large forehead, the little chin, small arms, large hands, little legs and feet. Not over four feet high. Look at those eyes when he comes back."

In a little over ten minutes the hydrocephalic dwarf came back. His face was expressionless and he shaded his eyes with his hand as he explained:

"There was a delay. A conference was being held. The final determination is to admit the three of you—*if* Sir Harry Brunton will assume full responsibility for the acts of the other two. You will follow me up the steps."

The three men started to arrange their packs and left the boat. Up the steps they went to the top of the crater. From the water the crater had looked like a mound of dirt, fifteen to twenty feet above the water edge.

From the top of the rim it was a hole, half a mile wide and interminably deep. The sides went down cleanly. It was a gigantic cylinder, a well so perfect in its roundness and smoothness that it gave the appearance of having been bored by the well-tools of a Titan.

"My word! *Remarkable!*" exclaimed the Englishman. "I have seen some holes, like the diamond mines in South Africa, but this is really the most perfect example of a boring I have ever viewed. I wonder if there are any bones at the bottom? No one can tell from here how deep it is, but it must be miles."

"Your audible thinking is remarkable," commented the guide.

"Do you find it so?" quickly replied the anthropologist.

"Absolutely. It has caused considerable comment among those who have heard it."

"My word! Yet, I will say this—sometimes I sit and think out loud, sometimes I just sit and think silently and and then at times I just sit."

The guide looked at him with that odd expressionless face which so far had shown no evidence of interest in anything that had happened. "It would seem," he said, "that you are endeavoring to indulge in what you call humorous language. We do not take pleasure in the action of laughter as you seem to do. That is one of the primitive expressions which we learned to be useless many thousands of years ago.

"A few of us have tried, for purposes of research, to rediscover the method. The one who was killed could laugh so that it sounded very much like the laugh of you Middle-Men. I heard him several times—but I did not like the sound. Besides, there was no necessity for it."

"Why do you call us the Middle-Men?" asked Sir Harry.

"Because you stand between the ape and the truly civilized," was the matter-of-fact answer.

"You interest me. It is all so absorbing in its unusual novelty. Now I am sure that there are bones at the bottom of this hole. Am I right?"

"Partly but not altogether. Your knowledge shows your comparative erudition, which alone makes you interesting to us. Now with regard to the bones—I am asked to show you something. Leave your property here. We will return. Besides, there is no need for you to carry it. Follow me."

They walked behind him for over a thousand yards along a well-beaten path around the top of the crater's edge. The rim was well over fifty yards wide but the hole was so deep in proportion to the depth that it seemed as though they were walking on a knife-edge.

Soon they saw a platform jutting out over the void. Though it was well-built and able to bear a hundred times their weight it made the three men almost giddy to walk out on it to the heavy rail that protected the edge. They were now twenty feet away from the edge of the crater, yet they could not see the bottom of the hole. It was lost in impenetrable blackness.

THEY were standing there, holding to the railing, when the guide called their attention to a long wooden chute that started near the platform and projected over the gulf for fifteen feet beyond, ending in a sharp dip.

"What does that look like to you?" he asked.

"The shoot-the-chute at Coney Island," answered Wright.

"It seems to be some kind of a toboggan track," whispered Ormond, his face a ghastly white.

But Sir Harry simply turned and asked, "Is it slippery?"

"It is. We have a purpose in showing you this. Whenever we have visitors we show them this. It is what you call a lesson in life. In a few minutes another Middle-Man will be here. We did not want him to come. You recall we sent a message, warning the Middle-Men to stay out of the forbidden land.

"This man came. We used him as we would. Then he tried to escape though he had been warned of what would be done to him. Now he will serve as a lesson to you servants from New York. I am sure that Sir Harry Brunton does not need the lesson."

"My word! But there is no objection to my watching, even if I do not need it, is there?"

"None at all. Your value to us will be in direct proportion to your ability to understand us. These two with you are of no value to us. They are here simply because you requested it. Here comes the Middle-Man. He moves slowly but he moves. Would you like to talk to him?"

"Fine idea," exclaimed Sir Harry. "He might have a last message or something."

The man came shuffling along the worn path of the crater. He walked as though each foot were weighted down with lead. His face was covered with the grime of months and a matted beard. What garments he had were more rags than clothes. Now and then he turned around and looked behind him and when he did so he cried as though in pain. After an eternity of waiting he dragged himself out upon the platform.

"Are you ready?" asked the guide.

"Yes, yes! Anything is better than that unending torture."

"You go cheerfully, willingly?"

"*No!* Oh—yes, YES! Make them stop it!"

"What are they doing to you, my man?" asked Brunton coldly.

"They stab me with fingers of fire. Look at my back. For months they have driven me with those sparks. See my back?"

And he tore off the few rags that covered him and turned around. His shoulders and back were covered with burns and scars of old injuries, none of them much larger than the head of a pin.

"My word! But you brought it all upon yourself. Why did you not do what they told you to do?"

"I tried to but it was hard and I wanted to get away. I thought it was my duty. I have an education. I owed it to my country to warn them. They played with me like a cat with a mouse. I was starting to swim the river when the electricity forced me back. Oh! I came back willingly—but who wouldn't when those things were stabbing you all the time?"

"I guess we had better hurry along," interrupted the guide. "You know what you have to do, so do it!" he ordered the trembling wretch.

The man turned around and started to walk to the toboggan. Ten feet away he turned and ran back, throwing himself at Ormond's feet.

"John! *John!* Can't you do something to save me? Don't you know me, John? Don't let them do it to me. Say something, please, say something to save me!"

Ormond looked down at the pleading man, then kicked at him with his heavy shoe. "Get away from me, you tramp! Who do you think I am anyway? What do I care what happens to you? Get out!"

The wretch shrieked and started to run for the chute. He threw himself into it headfirst and shot down it into the gulf below. As his body left the supporting framework he gave a scream, a loud piercing screech that echoed back and across the gulf, and finally died away in the depths below.

"My word!" exclaimed Sir Harry Brunton. "Serves the bounder right. No man should go where he is not wanted. Bones down there? I should say so. Clever idea. No blood. No one to blame but himself. Good riddance."

"It is well that you approve," said the guide. "We will go down now but we will take the escalator. I will go and arrange for your belongings. In the meantime walk around the platform and enjoy the scenery."

He left. Ormond, white as chalk and sweating, was trying hard to fight off a fainting spell. He rubbed his arm about the elbow.

Sir Harry Brunton held him on one side while Wright fanned him with his hat. "Good work, John, my lad," whispered the Englishman. "You remembered. Always remember to do what is expected of you. You were splendid. Tell me, John, how did you know the man? He seemed to know you."

Ormond shut his eyes as he answered, "That was Paul Ormond. He taught in the high school at Tiptonville."

"Ormond?" asked Mallory Wright.

"Yes. He was my brother," cried Ormond, covering his mouth to keep from crying.

CHAPTER IX

A Questionnaire

IN TEN minutes the guide returned. Following him were some pitiful-looking human beings, who carried the packs and impedimenta of the three explorers. On the faces of these beings was the same hopeless forlorn expression, the same cringing fearful look that had characterized the face of Paul Ormond.

With a gesture the guide directed Sir Harry Brunton to follow him, and the rest of the party descended into a metal cage, which dropped slowly down a shaft into the earth. After what seemed an interminable time the elevator stopped, a door opened and the guide without a word walked out, beckoning the three men to follow him. Through long corridors they walked and at last they came into a room that seemed comfortably equipped for living—though all the furnishings were of peculiar shape and construction.

"This is to be your room for the time being," the guide said. "You will find in it all the things to which you have been accustomed above. Over there in this white space set back from the wall is what you would call a television set. At the side you will find a keyboard with one bank of letters in your language.

"If you want to see any special country, city or man, write the names on this keyboard and press the red button. If you also want to hear what the men imaged there are saying, press the blue

button. To discontinue pull forward the lever with the yellow handle.

"Tomorrow morning you will be summoned to a conference. I am sure that you will sleep well. We are leaving all your property with you. But you cannot escape. I will show you."

He walked over to one of the cringing beings who had carried the baggage into the room. The slave looked at him with listless eyes. "What is your number?" he asked softly.

There was no reply. Without a word he extended a tube drawn from a pocket and pointed it at the being with his fingers. There was a crack; electricity seemed to leap from the tube and pierce the cheek of the slave. A bluish mark appeared and there was a cry of pain, piercing in its intensity.

"Now then," the guide repeated, "what is your number?"

"Seven thousand five hundred ninety, sir."

"Show me your tag."

The being held out his hand. A band had been clamped about the wrist and to this band was fastened a metal tag with the number upon it.

"What is your name?"

"Barbara Ward, sir."

"One of those useless women! I forgot there were any of you left. How did you come here?"

"My man and I did not want to leave our home. We stayed and you made us come down here, sir."

"Where is he now?"

"He tried to get away, sir."

"What happened?"

"You made him throw himself down that slippery plank, sir."

"Correct. The next time you are questioned answer at once. Now go back to your level, all of you. *Quick!*"

He turned to the three men, who had been listening intently to the dialogue, and said, "And that is what happens."

Sir Harry Brunton smiled as he replied, "My word! How the brutes smell! They seem to be a very low order of subhumans."

"You are correct," answered the guide. "Now I will leave you. Keep your watches wound. The conference is set at eight o'clock of your surface time tomorrow morning."

The three watched him leave with bated breath until they were certain that he was really gone. Then they looked at each other. The Englishman was the first to speak:

"I am going to have a bath and shave. No need now for further disguise. Suppose we make ourselves presentable, what say?"

They had hardly finished their toilets when a bell rang, an unseen door on one side of the room opened and a table with food on it rolled slowly into the room.

"Dinner is served. Let us eat," said the Englishman softly. He seemed to be in the best of humor but the two Americans were more than depressed.

"Cheerio, Ormond," exclaimed Sir Harry. "Smile a little."

"I can't—not just now. I don't see how you keep going, Sir Harry."

"That's easy to understand, my lad. I came here to find out some things. I am finding them out. Let us eat and be merry—for tomorrow we will see things hidden from the eyes of Middle-Men and the day after that we will see more things and—"

But Wright finished the sentence for him. "And the day after that we will be driven by those electric sparks to the shoot-the-chutes and that will be the end of learning these things."

"My word! You Americans think of the most frightful things, and I thought that you were buoyant. My supper was a success but you two hardly ate a thing. Have to do better than that. Let us wander over to the typewriter. I feel like an evening of merriment and mirth."

The machine was on a stone table near a white space on the wall of the room. "Let's see little old New York," suggested Wright.

"*No!*" whispered Ormond intensely. "I couldn't stand to look at Fifth Ave-

nue and Forty-Second Street just now. Sir Harry thinks there is a lot of humor in all this but where I was born and raised we thought a lot of our folks."

Sir Harry pressed the keys of the machine. First he wrote *7590* and then, as an afterthought, *Barbara Ward.* His index finger slowly bore down on the red button on the left side. The room plunged into darkness and the white sheet developed a glow that in a few seconds became a picture.

IT SHOWED a long room, lighted with the same concealed illumination that flooded their room. In two long rows down this room things that had once been men and women were trying to sleep. On a platform at each end sat large monstrosities, in the shape of men, yet bearing a strange resemblance to pieces of machinery.

Their arms were stretched out as though in silent benediction over the sleeping masses. Yet their hands held tubes and now and then cracking sparks of electricity would leap to find a resting place in the bodies of some of the things who had failed to keep a deathlike silence. When this happened, a dog-like howl of terror would come from the stricken prisoner.

Slowly the picture shifted till it focused directly on a woman. Her eyes were open and she breathed rapidly through her mouth—Barbara Ward. Sir Harry pressed the blue button, and a voice came from the woman though her lips hardly moved.

"I can't stand it. I can't *stand* it. I ought to have ended it long ago. I would have if I had not been such a coward. What is the use of living when there is no hope?"

She raised her right hand. Something glistened in it as the mechanical guard threw down the tormenting sparks on her. She had plunged a piece of sharp metal into her heart. She died without a sound.

The picture went black with her loss of consciousness.

Ormond leaped forward and took the lever with the yellow handle and pulled it forward. The light on the screen faded. The man from Tennessee looked at the Englishman.

"What now?" he asked expectantly.

"Bally fool, that woman!" said Sir Harry. "What did she want to go and kill herself for? Got the floor all bloody, by Jove! Let me get at that machine. I want to see dear old London."

Ormond looked at his friend. Wright winced. Ormond turned, walked over to one of the couches, threw himself on it and turned his face to the wall. He was in the land of the dead for the next eight hours.

For two hours Sir Harry played with the machine. He saw a hundred different places, fifty men he knew. He heard the President of the United States talk with his Secretary of State. Wright sat on one side, looking on but saying nothing.

At last the yellow lever brought back the lighted room. The Englishman lit his pipe and smoked in an apparently thoughtless manner. At last he spoke.

"Mallory, I want to say something to you. You have seen this machine work tonight. It is evidently very efficient in every way. I want you to keep one thing in mind, my lad. These people like me. Since I met them I have not only been talking their way but thinking their way. Now there is more than one machine like this, dear boy. Try to get John to see that fact—more than *one machine!*

"These people want me here for some reason and they don't want you and John at all, at least not as my companions. I suppose, though, they could use you a while as part of that crowd of rotting humanity. So tell John that perhaps every room has a machine like this and tell him to be as careful of his thoughts as of his words—because I may have a hard time protecting you lads and I don't want anything to happen to you. Now, what say we get some sleep?"

THEY were all up and active by seven the next morning. At seven-thirty the table of food again appeared in the same strange manner, and at ten minutes of eight the guide of the day before returned. He simply beckoned the three to follow him. The course that he took was confusing—through long winding tunnels and up and down elevator shafts in metal cages.

The visitors were relieved when at last he escorted them into a large room and told them to be seated. They had hardly seated themselves on the comfortable chairs when a door opened and through it walked three more dwarfs, similar to their guide but with even larger heads. Without the loss of a minute the three sat down opposite the explorers and the one in the middle began the conversation.

"I understand you are the Middle-Man called Sir Harry Brunton? You need not answer. The question was a mere formality. We are the three Co-ordinators of our race, ranking next to the Directing Intelligence. We have come here to meet you and to explain the reasons for your being allowed to come to Reelfoot Lake.

"Our nation is a very small one. In all parts of this planet there are somewhat fewer than twenty thousand of us. We are headed by a member who is called the Directing Intelligence. Immediately under him are ourselves, the three Co-ordinators—the name explains our function in the nation.

"Beneath us are the two hundred Specialists, each of whom is completely equipped educationally to direct operations in his specialty for the benefit of the nation. Under these are a variable number of individuals, whom we call Directors. They are kept quite busy directing our machinery.

"Of course practically all of our manual labor is done by machinery whose operation is controlled by automatic devices, such as our artificial men. A few Middle-Men perform menial services requiring little intelligence.

"Such a simple explanation of the nation will suffice for the time being. The Directing Intelligence lives in the same body for about two thousand years —the three Co-ordinators for a thousand—each Specialist is worn out by the time he is five hundred years old.

"The Directors live as long as they are useful. Of course, all of us could live much longer than we do. But we find that there is an age of maximum efficiency past which it is not well to let the individual live. Our constant thought is solely for the welfare of the nation.

"At certain times examinations are held among the large group of applicants and successors for all of us are chosen. Then comes a period of from twenty-five to two hundred years of special training of the winners—each winner being trained by the man he is to replace. When the teacher feels that the time is ready for replacement he announces that fact to the Co-ordinators and the new individual takes the place of the worn-out person.

"Since the nation has no further use for the worn-out unit he is allowed to take a painless lethal gas instead of dragging out a wretched useless existence through a protracted old age. Thus the efficiency of our complete mental machinery is preserved in undiminished strength.

"We have no sickness here and seldom an accident. We are well protected by our mechanical devices. However, a very unfortunate happening took place some time ago. One of our Specialists had made quite a study of the earth people. He prided himself on the fact that he was able to act in such a way as to imitate their mental behavior—for example he tried to learn to laugh.

"We selected him as the ambassador to the President of the United States and the fools above killed him. We had almost forgotten that there are such things as firearms. Our Specialist in armaments felt very badly about it. So we must make sure that we learn more about races like your own that are far

inferior to us but because of your numbers potentially dangerous.

"Therefore we have chosen an anthropologist like yourself, who will be our consultant, as liaison of information between the civilizations of the past and ours. We have conferred with the Directing Intelligence and decided that you should be that person."

"My word! What an honor! In what did he specialize, this poor fellow who was shot?" asked Sir Harry Brunton.

"He was our anthropologist. We have investigated and found that you were the one Middle-Man who seems to have a sufficiently comprehensive grasp of the subject to be of use to us. So when we learned you were coming to visit us we decided to make use of you. You will of course accept. You will find the work interesting, and the companionship with specialists pleasing."

"It is an honor to accept," replied Sir Harry seriously. "I know many anthropologists above who would give a good deal to have the chance. There is just one thing that I have to ask. I am not accustomed to machines doing my work for me. I brought along these two fellows, Wright and Ormond. They are just plain ordinary men but they like me and understand how to look after me. I want them to stay with me."

"We agree to that. After you become accustomed to our machinery, you will find a mechanical body servant a thousand times more capable than these ignorant animals ever could be. But we want you to be mentally and physically at ease. Therefore you may keep them till you no longer need them.

"Now we are going to go and visit the Directing Intelligence. He has held the office for thirteen hundred years and the nation has made some progress under his leadership. He is very desirous to see you, and has a great many questions to ask you. After that you will meet with the specialists and be given all the instruction required for your duties."

"It will be a great honor to see your ruler," said Sir Harry.

"We do not use that word here. That is a word of the Middle-Men that has no meaning with us."

"May I ask the name of your nation?" suddenly asked the anthropologist.

"Our name in our language is *Glow-wahr*—but when we hunted for a word of your Middle-Men to express it, we selected the word 'Conquerors,'" the central co-ordinator replied.

CHAPTER X

The Directing Intelligence

AT ONCE the three co-ordinators rose and asked Sir Harry to come with them. Wright and Ormond went along, as a matter of course. They realized that their position was a difficult and even a dangerous one—but while they were with the Englishman they were confident of his ability to protect them.

As they walked through the long halls the spokesman of the three co-ordinators talked freely to Brunton. "The Directing Intelligence," he said, "usually stays in one of our Eastern centers. But he made the trip to the Reelfoot Lake hole on purpose to see you as soon as he could. That is most unusual.

"Of course, you are only a Middle-Man but you have gone far in advance of your race. At least, you have specific knowledge which we need—and we are willing to allow you to impart that knowledge to us. The Directing Intelligence will give you a general idea of our race although he is not the specialist in history."

As he spoke, they came into a large room which contained only a central table with five chairs around it. At the head of this table sat a dwarf who was different from the others in no detail except that he had a slightly larger head. He remained seated as the party came in. His face was expressionless.

"I am interested to see that you arrived safely," the Directing Intelligence began in a low voice. "The co-ordinators have told you the reason why you are here. We want you to supply us with certain information during the period of your usefulness. I know that this invitation has met with your approval.

"I do not say that we are pleased or delighted. Such emotions passed out of our life many thousands of years ago. In fact, as soon as we realized that the emotional states of love, pleasure, hatred, anger, jealousy, fear and passion were a hindrance to our proper development, we took steps to eradicate them from our lives.

"As you know, these emotions are simply the result of secretions from the internal glands. We eliminated these specific glandular functions, as we have done with many other things by a process of selective breeding and embryonic feeding. As a race we are emotionless. We are highly developed and highly efficient intellectual units.

"We have always subordinated the interest of the individual to the better and more worth-while interests of the nation. All this will be more fully explained to you by our specialists. What I am trying to do now is to give you a general view of our life, the life you will live with us."

"I am glad to stay on here with you," said the Englishman simply.

"You should be. You have the honor of being the first Middle-Man who has ever been asked to come to our world. Many have come uninvited and, as you know, they have all stayed. They are useful in a way—though not nearly as capable as machines.

"I will give you a brief account of our race. The historian will supplement it but I want you to get it first from me. As you can readily see, we are human beings like yourself—but more perfectly developed. I cannot tell you when we left the other races of men but it was approximately a hundred thousand

[*Turn page*]

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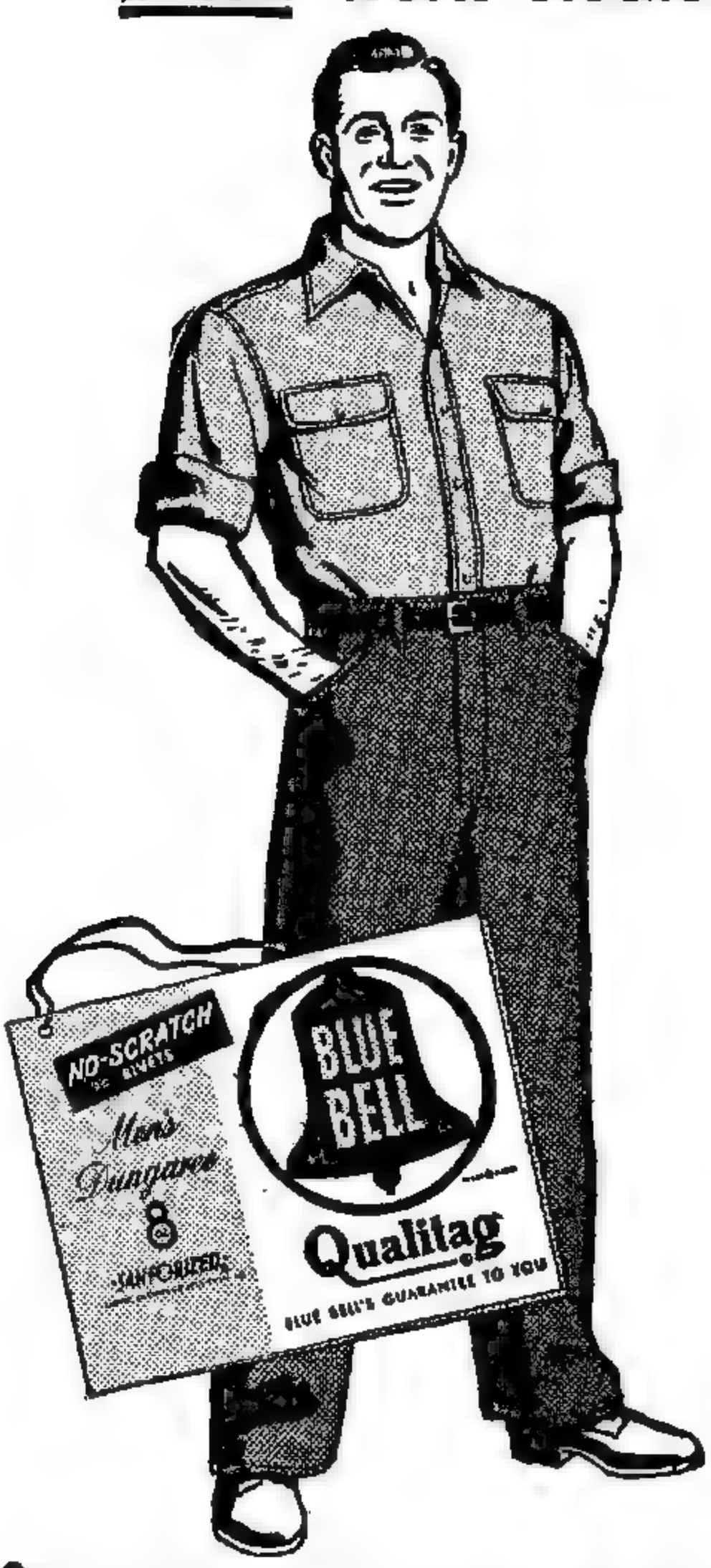

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years ago. Our complete records show at least eighty thousand years of life separate from other earth men.

"We were made into an underground nation by Glomin, a great genius. He had a vision of what life would be on the surface of the earth. He developed the idea that life would be safer, existence more tolerable, the fight for necessities less arduous, if we lived under the earth instead of on it.

"There is no doubt that when this man and his followers went under the surface they were similar to the earthmen of that time. So we have two streams from the same source, one living on and the other below the surface of the earth. For thousands of years one race of men has lived by brute strength and its emotions—while the other has cultivated the intellect.

WE CHANGED rapidly. There were no wars to decimate us, no famines to undermine our strength and diseases were soon under our control. Our specialists in medicine and surgery will tell you in detail of the advances we have made. You will find it all very interesting; and, at the same time it will prove to you that our ambassador was right on the whole when he told the President of the United States that our race is as far above the Middle-Men as they are above the ape. You are an exception.

"It may be well to explain to you the reason for some of the events of the last year and a half. We have, in these five American states, several holes such as the one by which you entered at Reelfoot Lake. They are in isolated spots, and we had been able so to terrorize the mountaineers that they were more than willing to leave us alone.

"Your invention of the airplane changed all that. It seemed to us that the only way to preserve this isolation was by a prohibition of air traffic over our territory. At the time when we issued the first edict it was thought that it would be at once obeyed and that there would be no more trouble.

"The antagonism of the United States was not a part of the anticipated program. But there was only one thing to do and that was to clear the territory of you Middle-Men. To do this we used the most sensible method—that of making the territory unfit for you to live in.

"However, we are now ready to extend our plans. I will explain this by saying that, fifty thousand years ago we prepared a definite program which would give us an opportunity to live out our destiny apart from your race and, at the same time to allow you Middle-Men, within limits, to live yours. The working out of this program has been most interesting and you, as a member of our staff, should be satisfied to live here and study its more intimate details. We will go into that later on. Have you any questions?"

"Several," replied Brunton. "Just how were you able to interfere with the radio waves? What was your method of preventing the planes from flying over the forbidden territory? How do you produce the mist? What general method of living produces your longevity?"

"These are all very appropriate questions. First, all of your so-called modern inventions have been our property for thousands of years. We then undertook successive developments which give us an ability to neutralize the powers that we had discovered.

"We control a force that is able to refract or bend all radio waves so that they converge and are appreciable only at the magnetic poles. I presume you would call it electromagnetic dispersion. By a second process, using ionic attractors of great size placed under the earth, we are able to withdraw electrical force so completely from any territory that all electrical machinery is useless.

"The mist is peculiarly valuable. You commented the other day on the fact that you have seen similar mist in a valley in Asia. That was our formation and we made use of it there for the same purpose that we made use of it here.

We wanted the population to withdraw so that we would have complete isolation.

"Of course, you know that the center of the earth is a molten mass. In a few places this breaks through in the form of volcanoes—but everywhere, if sufficient depth is obtained, intense heat can be observed. We bore holes at regular intervals, till we obtain the requisite temperature and then divert subterranean rivers into these holes.

"Steam in enormous quantities is formed. It rises into the air as steam, high enough to be condensed, and then falls as a mist. Naturally there is a great increase in the temperature, with heavy rainfall and a marked growth of vegetation. However, we add to the destruction by sprinkling over the cities and roads a special powder which has a marked disintegrating effect on iron, stone and cement. We do this from our airplanes.

"What we wanted to do with the territory of these five states was to eliminate all traces of Middle-Men. It is simply an experiment; we wish to see whether it would return to its original condition before you began to waste it, revert completely to a state of nature. In one year we have obtained great success in our work of restoration. I think that in five more years we will have a complete growth of briars and berry bushes over Memphis, Nashville and Richmond.

NOW, there remains one more question. In regard to our longevity I will tell you that, should we lose sight of the welfare of our nation, it would never be necessary for any of our race to die. The factor we use to determine our life span is our efficiency.

"Our bodies are practically immortal. Our nervous systems, unfortunately, are not. We have a period of maximum mental efficiency and after that there is a slight decline. Centuries ago we determined that to wait for that decline would interfere with the upward progress of the nation.

"We combat disease with our leucocytes—the more white cells in our blood, the better able we are to resist infection. In addition to that we live in natural and artificial caves whose atmosphere has been freed of germs. By a process of natural selection we have changed our blood composition till the white corpuscles far outnumber the red.

"We remain few in number by keeping a careful watch on the growth of the population. Only the best individuals are allowed to live. Examinations are held when necessary and all who are not sufficiently promising are eliminated.

"We have just conducted such an examination. Twenty of our specialists applied to the co-ordinators for pupils—a group of two thousand was ordered to take the examinations. Each specialist has about one hundred students in training—that is about the average size of a class in our preliminary colleges. Out of these the most brilliant member is selected and the failures are either put to other work or disposed of.

"The disposal ceremony will take place this morning so that you may see it. I am sure that its efficiency will interest you, especially when you compare it with the childish methods of your Middle-Men. You spend time, effort and wealth in educating millions who, even when educated, are unable to serve any useful purpose and must be supported by the nation. You will accompany me now to the place of disposal."

"It will be a valuable opportunity," was the Englishman's answer.

The Directing Intelligence slowly arose from his seat and, side by side with Sir Harry, walked out of the room, followed by the three co-ordinators. The two Americans went along as a matter of course. They were silent—not even trying to think.

After a short walk and a journey in an elevator the explorers found themselves in a great hall at the end of which was a large platform. On this platform a group of white-robed "hydrocephalics"

were waiting and, behind them was another group in white robes, edged with purple. The hall was filled with other dwarfs.

"These are the twenty specialists and their successors," explained the Directing Intelligence. "Specialists always devote a great deal of their time to transmitting their knowledge by personal instruction to their pupils, who will ultimately become their successors. This will be made clearer to you by the ceremony.

"I will ask the Educational Co-ordinator to take charge of the ceremonies and I will sit down. At times the weight of my head is oppressive and I find it best not to over-exert myself. In fact, I think that shortly it will be necessary for me to take steps to have myself replaced."

One of the co-ordinators, who up to this time had been silent, now stepped to the edge of the platform. He began his short address.

"Twenty of our specialists have asked for pupils and, out of a class of two thousand, twenty have been selected by competitive examinations. On these twenty the white robes, edged with purple, have been placed. It will be their duty to acquire the wisdom of their teachers and even add to it—so that, when the time comes for the retirement of the latter, the pupils will be able to take their places and thus preserve the continuity of our knowledge.

"I am confident that you will prove worthy in every way of the honor placed on your intellectual life. I now ask all to form in a double line on either side of the Lethal Chamber door to salute the two hundred who are to be eliminated from our race."

The Directing Intelligence stood up and took Brunton's arm. They led the way to a door at the end of the hall. On either side the specialists and their new pupils placed themselves. Ormond and Wright stood behind but were well able to see over the heads of the dwarfs in front of them.

From the vast group in the hall rose quietly and in predetermined order those students who had failed to prove the right to live. Without a sound, without even a change of expression, they marched one by one through a door which swung open to receive them and swung slowly back before the next advanced.

CHAPTER XI

An Initiation

AT LAST they were all gone—two hundred men of this strange race deliberately slaughtered because they had failed to show their intellectual right to live as active members of the Ruling Minds.

Then came a double column of men, twenty in number. On one side they were clad in white robes—on the other side the robes were white, edged with purple. Up to them stepped the Educational Co-ordinator.

"You specialists have taught your pupils all that you know and, realizing that your mentality is passing the peak of usefulness, have asked for the right to pass through the Lethal Chamber. I will, therefore, ask the pupils to remove their robes."

Twenty of the men did so. Then the orator resumed. "I will now ask your teachers to invest you with their robes."

Slowly the twenty specialists took off their white robes and invested their former pupils with them. Then the speaker walked to the head of the line.

"As specialists you have served the nation carefully and well. You have added to the general uplift of our nation. In leaving us you will have the consciousness that you have never failed to place the race above the individual. You now have our permission to depart. I will ask the new specialists to take their places with their fellow leaders."

And the twenty naked specialists, who had committed no error save that of yielding to the deterioration of time, one by one stepped through the door of the Lethal Chamber to eternity. They too showed no emotion and went to their deaths without a sound.

The Directing Intelligence turned to Sir Harry Brunton. "Thus," he remarked, "we preserve the intellectual vigor of our nation. I will now have you sent back to your apartment where, this afternoon, you will be visited by our specialist in human biology. Tomorrow you will be taken to see some parts of our nation that will interest you. Now I will leave you."

Soon our three friends were back in their room. Their guide left them alone and a table, well-laden with food, shot as usual through the hole. Ormond looked at Sir Harry Brunton and simply exclaimed, "Well?"

The Englishman smiled back as he muttered, "My word! Bones? I should say so."

Most of that dinner was spent in silence. Not till the end of it were the spirits of the New Yorkers sufficiently revived to permit of conversation. Suddenly Wright said smilingly to Ormond, "We both went through high school and college, didn't we, John?"

"Yes—but you learned something and I just went through."

"We used to think that the professors were severe and that at times they failed to pass men who might have slipped through had they had a little better than even break."

"Yes—life at college was pretty hard at times."

"Well, we just did not know what it was to study. Graduation day here is somewhat different from what it was when we received our degrees, eh, John?"

Ormond never answered. He just stared in front of him with a set expression on his face. Sir Harry struck into the conversation.

"John, my lad, you must control your emotions. What we have seen is efficiency plus. I know lots of men with whom I went to the university, who should have been handled as these failures were this morning. I like the idea. Why should men live who are unable to make the grade and amount to something?

"These brainy dwarfs are teaching me a lot. I would be false to the best in me if I did not appreciate the wonderful system of life that these gentlemen have evolved through the ages while we have been wasting, murdering each other to satisfy the cravings of our various emotions."

While he was talking a white-robed dwarf came in. He introduced himself, as all these people did, not by a personal name, but by the position that he occupied. The name of the individual was a thing of no importance—what really counted was the work that he did for the nation.

"I am the specialist in applied biology," the dwarf began. "I have been asked to come and tell you something about the origin of life in our race. Applied biology, let me say, is very important to the national existence—for if any of us failed in our work of studying cells, their growth and deterioration, then the battle we have won against nature would be lost.

"A great many centuries ago, perhaps forty thousand years, the then Directing Intelligence made the observation that not all women were satisfactory as sources of propagation. Some were sterile. Others who were fertile and intelligent, did not care to go through the ordeal of childbirth.

"In fact, the more intelligent our women were at the time the fewer children they had, and, of course, as our aim was a constantly growing intelligence, we felt that we could not trust the future of the race in the hands of the children of the ignorant. At the present time I understand that you Middle-Men are facing these very problems.

"In order to secure a proper viewpoint we began to study biologic problems and their solution through the older forms of life—the termite, ant, bee and cockroach. From a study of them we evolved a scheme of perpetuating life that has become very satisfactory in every way.

"Each year we select from a group of five hundred mature young females twenty-five of special intelligence and other high hereditary qualities. These occupy the same relation to our biologic life that the queen bee holds in the hive. The skill of many generations of specialists in embryology, surgery and internal secretions has made our queens able to generate one egg a day, which is at once removed and placed in an incubator.

"These incubators are placed on a carrying belt, which moves in an endless circle through our specially-heated and lighted nurseries. Over twenty thousand filled incubators, holding units in every stage of development, are constantly passing through the testing and sorting rooms. For the actual care, the feeding and the nursing, we have specially-built machines.

THE final sorting is done by my pupil and myself. On us devolves the responsibility of removing those that show signs of being unfit—so that the standards of the nation will be constantly improved. When the sex is determined most of the females are removed. After birth all the infant units are examined by our specialist in psychology and about half of those are disposed of.

"As the empoy incubators are at once sterilized and prepared for more eggs, we have, in spite of the large percentage of discards, an abundance of material for training purposes. The females are kept in their own cavern and are taken out only when they are discarded or to be placed in the queens' cave, which is adjacent to the incubator and nursery houses.

"As you have perhaps observed, for propagation we follow the efficient method of so many of the lower forms of life. However, our sexlessness is more apparent than real. A sexless person, by special feeding and glandular medication, can be made into an efficient male in ten years. The only male who retains his sexual power is the Directing Intelligence. He is the father of all of us.

"The queens are watched carefully, and as soon as there is the slightest sign of deterioration in one she is discarded. By our system of inbreeding we have continued to raise the level of our mental life. The specialist in psychology tells me that the race as a whole has a mental power that is at least fifty percent greater than it was ten thousand years ago.

"The various caves under my direct care are in an inaccessible portion of Asia. We will go there eventually but for the present I will show you various scenes from my department. Suppose you sit in front of this screen?

"Now I will show you the queens' house. At present we have only fifty queens there. Our supply of intelligent females has not been satisfactory lately. For two hundred years we have had difficulty in obtaining females of the best grade. They have no function except the production of ova. Their bodies are very small and their heads also are smaller than ours.

"This is a very uninteresting scene—so we will go on to another. Here we have a section of the incubator room. My assistant is at work, sorting out the weaklings and the surplus females. He is a very brilliant and tireless worker and already his judgment in regard to immature units is slightly better than mine.

"You notice that he holds a lever in his right hand and carefully examines each immaturity as it slowly passes before him on the endless belt. When he finds a discard he presses that lever, the incubator is taken off the belt, the contents discarded, the incubator sterilized and made ready for another egg.

"See! He has discarded one, a potential female. Now the incubator leaves the belt. It is taken to another belt by a machine worker, a door is opened and it is emptied by means of a vacuum cleaner into a tunnel which ends in a pit similar to the one you saw used so efficiently today."

He paused briefly to watch the work of his assistant.

"Of course, you understand that the disposal pits we use at the present time are simply the homes of different races of animals that have disappeared from the surface of the earth. We felt that science demanded that these animals and reptiles be preserved—so we dug these enormous holes and are using them for game preserves.

"But they have to be fed—so we fed them with the discards of our nation. When these are not sufficient we throw down thousands of Middle-Men. I believe they prefer the bodies of Middle-Men to our discards. Perhaps the blood and taste are different.

"But just as soon as a growing unit—I believe you would call it a baby—is discarded it is put into an inclined tunnel and shot down into a pit. Thus nothing, not even our immaturities, is wasted. Now if you will watch carefully, you will notice that my assistant is examining the first of a hundred incubators with units in them that are sufficiently aged to be started in nursery life.

"Perhaps of that hundred he will discard twenty-five. The specimens that are passed are taken to the nursery for an intelligence test. We consider that they are now a day old. At once they are taught by radio-hypnosis. The units are gone over once a year and all who do not make satisfactory progress are discarded.

"At the age of twenty their general education is at an end and they are divided into two hundred groups, each of which is given an intensive education in one specialty. From these groups, as necessity arises, the new specialists are selected.

WE SELECT our Directors from a specially-fed and prepared group. They have little responsibility but are excellent routine supervisors of our machinery. Practically all the finer work of our nation is done by specialized machines—I believe you call them robots. All that the directors do is to supervise these robots.

"Of course there is a lot of work that is so hard and dirty that we do not care to construct delicate machines to perform it and here we use the Middle-Men we have taken as slaves. We have perfected special machines to act as overseers and we have but little trouble in training the slaves to perform routine tasks.

"We have no time limit for the life of the directors. They simply go on working till they become inefficient and then we replace them.

"Rarely the Directing Intelligence determines that it would be best that his office be filled by a younger unit, chosen by a competitive examination. No one need take it who does not wish to. Only the three co-ordinaters and the two hundred specialists are eligible. On the appointed day the candidates face the Directing Intelligence and are asked a number of questions. The candidate who passes the test most successfully is chosen as the rival of the Directing Intelligence.

"With the three co-ordinators as judges the two are tested and if the candidate worsts the Directing Intelligence the latter places himself in the Lethal Chamber and the new director takes office. The new head of our nation is at once cared for by the specialists in diet and internal secretion and as soon as he becomes a functioning male he spends half a year in the queens' house. He returns there once every twenty-five days.

"This was the method originated many thousands of years ago. For the last three thousands of years it has been slightly modified. The displaced ruler lives long enough, one or two hundred years, to impart his special knowledge

to his successor. He is not required to do this but he may if he wishes to. The last four have kept on living.

"By this scientific method of renewing the units of our nation we have been very successful in raising the standard of intelligence. We have found that life is a great deal more comfortable without the female sex. We have always felt that it was best to absolutely segregate the queens. Now I am very much interested in your opinion of this propagating method. How does it appeal to you?"

"It's almost perfect," was the Englishman's enthusiastic response. "Personally, I have never had anything to do with women—for early in life I realized the fact that the more man associates with women the more he is hindered in making a success in his specialty. Now you say that the quality of your unit has been deteriorating—"

"Yes," the dwarf replied. "Our charts show that for eight hundred years there has been a steady increase in the number of units that must be rejected on the first examination. And even those that are retained have not the same qualities of intelligence, originality and adaptability as our standard prescribes."

Suddenly the specialist ceased speaking and removed from the voluminous folds of his gown a little black box, which he opened and on which he pushed a button. Then he held it close to his mouth and spoke a few words into it.

"The Directing Intelligence wishes us to repair to his room," he said to Sir Harry. The latter nodded and, together with Wright and Ormond, followed the specialist out of the room.

When they were in the presence of the Directing Intelligence he spoke to them. "Tomorrow I am going to take you on a trip to some of our more important caves. Most of them are natural caves, greatly enlarged by our machines. All of our caves are connected by tunnels, through which we travel by means of cars, driven by atomic energy which we learned to harness and control.

"It is very important that you obtain a thorough idea of our plans. Now that you are to be a consultant in anthropology we want you to obtain our viewpoint of everything. Have you a clear account of our process of reproduction?"

"A very satisfactory one. Your biologist is a remarkably clever man."

"It is well that you met him. Had you come a month later you would have found him replaced by his pupil. That young man is learned but has some peculiar ideas of his own importance. He hopes to become some day the Directing Intelligence of our nation."

"My word! What an ambition for a youngster to have! How crude of him to think that he could qualify!"

"Of course he has a right to if he can qualify. But the truth is that it is difficult to get enough candidates. For the last few hundred years there has been a growing disinclination among our members to accept responsibility. It's unprecedented.

"I will send for you in the morning. The co-ordinators will go into conference with me. We must replace our sociologist. He has been found wandering about our halls in a dazed fashion and insisted later on being permitted to enter the Lethal Chamber. He left no pupil and our decision will be a delicate one."

Once again the three earth men were back in their room. Ormond, as usual, was silent. The Englishman looked at him out of one corner of his right eye. Wright walked over to the control table of the television screen and picked out the letters to form

THE QUEENS' CAVE

He then pressed the red button. Immediately a picture of the room glowed increasingly distinct on the screen, till at last the women near the front were almost life-size. Wright looked at them carefully. Then he pressed the blue button. Not a sound was heard.

"These are peculiar women," commented the New Yorker. "Most peculiar.

A room full of females and not one of them talking. But there is one thing about these women, Sir Harry. They do not seem to be well. Something is wrong with them."

CHAPTER XII

More Captives

THE Englishman joined the New Yorker in his inspection of the picture. "The only thing I can see is that they all have large necks."

"That's it—goitre, *hyperthyroidism* and *exopthalmos*. Bet they are in a limestone country. Singular their medical specialist did not see that. What's this? There come two women. *Quick!* Press the blue button."

And as two clean fresh-looking young girls appeared on the screen voices came distinctly. "I don't care so much for myself, Joan—but I'm worried about you."

"That's all right, old dear. Not your fault. Although you insisted on going on the walking trip into this forbidden land I insisted on going with you—and then Aunt Charlotte insisted on going with us as chaperone and that's all there is to it. We were all determined to have our own way, so here we are. It's not your fault that we were captured by these monsters and put in the chamber of horrors. But what do you think happened to Auntie?"

"That is what makes me sick, Antoinette. That little dwarf told us very distinctly that we were to be sent to the Queens' house for an experiment—but he did not say a word about the old lady. Can you imagine her drawing herself up and saying in her regal tones, 'I am Miss Charlotte Carter of Cartersville, Carter County, Virginia. I demand that you release me at once, also my two charges, or I shall report the matter at once to my senators at Washington, D.C.'?"

"That was a long trip in that tunnel car, Joan. How far do you think we came and where do you think we are?"

"How can I tell? If this is the queens' house, I suppose these are the queens. Poor dears, how unhappy they look and how odd in every way!"

Wright pulled the lever with the yellow handle. Then he picked out on the machine.

MISS CHARLOTTE CARTER

He pressed the red button. In no time appeared a picture of a small cave with bars in front of it. Behind the bars was a fine-looking white-haired woman in a walking suit. Wright pressed the blue button and the woman spoke.

"Just wait till the President hears of this and there will be a most distinctly unpleasant time for these scoundrels."

"My word, Wright! She's fuming!" said Sir Harry.

"They're a hot-headed lot. Comes from one of those old Virginia families that knew Washington when he had to work for a living. A real aristocrat. Proud old lady, isn't she?"

"It seems so. One of the young ladies is her niece and the other a friend. Too bad they had to come across the border. My word. Too bad—but now they are here they will have to take the consequences. What?" He winked slowly at Wright.

The New Yorker winked back and said, "Let them suffer. Probably flappers, seeking new sensations. They may find them in that cave. Gee! I sure am tired. Let's go to bed. Come on, Ormond, get some sleep. No use brooding because you'll never see any elephants down here. I'll show you something worth shooting tomorrow."

The next morning the spokesman of the three co-ordinators came to their room soon after they had finished breakfast. "The Directing Intelligence is ready for the journey," he announced. "Come with me. We are going to our large cave under the desert of Gobi at once."

In fifteen minutes they were seated in a small cigar-shaped car. The seats were double. In one pair sat the Directing Intelligence and Sir Harry. Behind them sat the co-ordinator and in the rear of the car were the nonentities, Wright and Ormond.

"This is one of our earth-circling cars," explained the coordinater. "You will note the directing mechanism in the front of the car. It is simply another keyboard. We spell the name of our destination and the car goes to that place, being guided by a radio beam. All I have to do is to pick out the letters GOBI, press this lever and we are off."

The tunnel car shot forward at what seemed to be a moderate speed. The explorers were astonished when the coordinator whispered to Brunton that they were going at the rate of five hundred miles an hour and would even approach double that speed during the journey.

"NO DOUBT you are interested in the source of power, not only for the tunnel cars but for all our machinery. First, how do Middle-Men obtain power? Usually they convert the energy of coal into electrical energy by combustion. They use only an infinitesimal portion of the energy the coal contains.

"But we are able to take that same ton of coal and annihilate it and obtain eighteen billion times as much power from the ton of coal. If you knew the secret you could send one of your ocean liners from Europe to America and back again with the expenditure of a piece of coal smaller than a pea. We do that.

"With such a source of power the matter of speed is purely one of overcoming friction. That is a problem which we have not worked out up to the present time. Of course, we can go fast, probably more than a thousand miles an hour, though we find that such a speed is rarely advisable."

"Even at that rate it will take us some time to arrive at the Gobi cave," he continued. "At first you will think that cave disappointing, because, on casual examination it is so similar to the cave at Reelfoot. But it is really very remarkable. In the first place it is a natural crater over five miles in diameter.

"Thousands of years ago our nation began digging into its walls and now we have an underground city that could, if emergency arose, accommodate the entire nation for an indefinite period. It is in this cave that we keep the queens and here also we raise the young units till they are past the nursery stage of life.

"You will be interested in our art gallery. For the last fifty thousand years we have been painting a history of our race on the walls of the Gobi cave. Every hundred years our artists do a mural that is characteristic of the most remarkable feature of that century.

"We do not care for the emotional side of art, but rather for its historical and social values. For that reason we have slowly accumulated the paintings and sculpture also of your races. Of course most of them are crude but at the same time they are worth preserving as a matter of record."

"It must be a remarkable collection," exclaimed the anthropologist.

"It is. So many things would have been destroyed by your Middle-Men had it not been for us. That library at Alexandria would have been completely burned by the Mohammedans but we were able to arrive in time to save over half of it. When Constantinople was captured we saved some of the best things in the city.

"And then we were careful, when we destroyed Atlantis, to save a great many of the art treasures of that country."

"My word! You must pardon me," interjected the Englishman, "but did I hear you right? Did you say you destroyed Atlantis?"

"Yes. It was a remarkable nation. But they were beginning to know too much. They were making such rapid advances in every branch of learning that they had to be destroyed. We felt that if they

continued at that rapid rate they were apt to surpass us some day. We frequently destroy civilizations that annoy us. Sometimes we do this through our agents who obtain control of the countries by means of their superior intelligence."

AT THIS point the Directing Intelligence slowly turned his body and head around till he was able to look at Brunton.

Then he joined the conversation.

"We have given considerable thought to the civilizations of the present day. If it were necessary we could produce a war more terrible that that of nineteen fourteen. Of course, it is a tedious cumbersome method. Our bacteriologist is working on this problem now and it may be that in a short time we shall be able, when we wish, to introduce diseases into the world that will complete the destruction of the Middle-Men in a short time. He is a very brilliant worker and since he has started in experimentation on animals he has made some unusually rapid progress toward discovering the nature of life."

"So you believe in vivisection?"

"Absolutely. It is the only scientific method. We have used many of our captives for experiments in breeding. Many of the women killed themselves but we are more careful now. Would you like to see these laboratories?"

"I would indeed, sir. It would be a pleasure. The more I see of your nation the greater my admiration for your efficiency and your whole-hearted determination to allow nothing to interfere with your progress. You have never known the meaning of the words failure or discouragement."

"I am not so sure of that," was the peculiar reply.

Hour after hour they shot on through the tube—but at last the car came to a stop. The doors were opened and they walked out into a well-lighted hall and from there to a larger room, where a gathering of specialists and their pupils were awaiting them.

CHAPTER XIII

Charlotte Carter of Cartersville

FORMAL greetings were exchanged and then the entire party seated themselves at a long table. Food in abundance was placed before them. The food looked good, and had a fragrant odor that was more suggestive of flowers than vegetables.

As they ate, they tried to identify the various dishes—but finally even the Englishman had to admit that all were absolutely new to him. Some days later they learned the reason for their gastronomic ignorance. All of the foods were synthetic, prepared in the laboratory. The flavor, different in every dish, was placed there to enable the dwarfs to eat more heartily of the food. While bereft of emotion, they still retained their senses of taste and smell.

The three earthmen, during the time they ate their synthetic food, had to acknowledge that though they had sufficient nourishment for all physical needs they were never really satisfied. They were fifty thousand years behind the dwarfs, so far as their gastro-intestinal tracts were concerned. No matter how much they ate of the highly concentrated food they still longed for the meat and vegetables of their former life.

In a short time the table was cleared and the co-ordinator began, "The chief reason for this meeting is to introduce Harry Brunton to many of our specialists and induct him into his duties and privileges as consultant to the specialist in anthropology. He will have all the rights of the rest of the group and have authority to carry on experiments and researches covered by his specialty. We will now ask him to remove his clothes entirely so that we can clothe him in the robes of his profession."

Brunton had traveled all over the

earth. He had been made a member and blood brother of more than one savage tribe. He passed through the uncovering of his body in public with a peculiar dignity that won the respect of all present. Shame was an emotion unknown to the underground race. But they knew that such an emotion existed among the earth people and they watched eagerly for its appearance in this noted stranger who had been selected by their Directing Intelligence to be one of them till his death.

A young dwarf now came forward with a white robe and assisted Brunton to drape it around his body, drawing the sash and tying it in a peculiar knot. Now the Directing Intelligence stood up and gave his charge in low emotionless tones.

"You, Harry Brunton, are now consultant to the Specialist in Anthropology for the people of Glow-wahr. In this position you will be given rights and powers inferior only to that of a specialist. You will at once select a pupil and bestow on him the wisdom that you possess in your special branch of intelligence. This pupil will be your guide.

"You are free to come and go as you wish throughout our realm. No door can be locked against you. But remember that for a long period you will be under the closest observation. The meeting is at an end. All will leave except the new consultant."

The co-ordinator walked up to Wright and Ormond and commanded them to go with him. "You need have no fear. Your master's position protects you. But you cannot stay here. Our ruler wishes privacy."

"Come and sit near me," said the Directing Intelligence to Brunton. "I want to talk to you about some private matters. I want to make life here as pleasant as I can for you, so that you may work more efficiently. Were there more like you on the earth, we might be able to establish a reconciliation with your race.

"After talking over your future with the co-ordinators, I decided inasmuch as you are not yet unsexed, you would desire a female to live with. So we decided to secure a Middle-Woman for you, one of your own age and interested in anthropology and archaeology. She was a professor in these subjects at an American college for women and was one of a party of three women we picked up walking through Kentucky.

"Our specialist in machinery will make you a robot servant that can tame her till she is willing to submit to your authority. Her name is Miss Charlotte Carter. She will now be brought in."

In a few minutes the lady from Cartersville, Carter County, Virginia, walked in. She lost no time in making her demands. "If you men are the rulers of this savage country you will at once order my release and also that of the two young ladies of whom I am in charge—Miss Joan Summers and my niece, Miss Antoinette Carter. Our abduction was a most shameful affair and will call for the most severe reprisals as soon as Washington is notified of it."

The Directing Intelligence turned to the Englishman eagerly. "You will have to explain matters to her. She is your female and you will have to handle her."

"My word! Awkward position, Madam."

"I am not a madam. I am a Miss."

"My error. Pardon. You make me feel like wilted lettuce. But to business at once. This gentleman is the Directing Intelligence of a race of super-beings who are called the Ruling Minds of Glow-wahr. On the earth they are known as the 'Conquerors'—you may have heard of them.

"I am Harry Brunton and I have been given the honor of being made consultant to their specialist in anthropology. I will probably remain here the rest of my life. Without consulting me they decided to provide me with a female and for that distinctive purpose you have been brought here from America to this Gobi cave in Asia.

"You are here and you cannot return —so you had better make the best of it. Lots of things could happen to you down

here worse than living with me. We are both interested in anthropology. Thus we shall have a great deal in common. I think that you had better be nice about it. My friends down here are not very familiar with ladies of the earth and they might not treat you very well."

The Virginian lady walked up to the Englishman. "If you were the last man on earth I wouldn't marry you!" she cried.

"My word! No one said anything about marriage," exclaimed Brunton. He turned to the Directing Intelligence.

"She cannot think. Reasoning is impossible for her. Marriage! My word! And I have refused a dozen of the prettiest heiresses in Europe! I'll tame her. My word! Or shoot her down to the bone-makers. Have her taken out and washed and a white robe put on her and we will take her back to my apartment at Reelfoot."

"If you prefer we will send her to the Experimental Laboratory," said the ruler. "We thought you would want one of your own age. We will get you any kind of a woman you want."

"This one will do. But get her out at once!"

As though in anticipation of his desires two dwarfs came into the room, took the woman by the arms and led her out. The Directing Intelligence raised his hands and supported his head on either side with them.

"I have a peculiar feeling in my head. Five hundred years ago I could have faced any problem without difficulty. I could go for days without sleep. Now it is different. Perhaps this is the end. You heard what happened to our sociologist. The biologist tells the co-ordinators that the queens are not well and that the new units are of a very poor quality. The time may be ripe for the selection of a new Directing Intelligence.

"Of course, this is confidential. Whenever we change leaders there is always a period of uncertainty and unrest. Perhaps we have too many Middle-Men working for us. They are always hard to handle. Perhaps the machine overseers are too severe. That happened once before and most of our Middle-Men were killed before we changed the machines to a less powerful voltage. A great many of the workers are suicides.

"It is becoming more difficult to secure material for our diffuse labor. Naturally our machines do a great deal. But there are some types of work that we have never been able to build machinery for. I am also bothered about our slaves. I want to dispose of them in some way. I want you to give it some thought."

AS though in obedience to an unspoken request the co-ordinator returned to the room, bringing with him Wright and Ormond. They were told to sit down. The Directing Intelligence turned to the co-ordinator.

"I want you to talk to them, then take the three of them out and show them the Zoological Gardens."

"The ruler of our nation directs me to explain some parts of our work to you," the co-ordinator said. "Many thousands of years ago, when we realized how far we were above the Middle-Men of our age, we also saw how impossible it was for them to preserve their national entity under the conditions of hardship and constant war and famine that they were exposed to.

"We saw also that many of the animals of that period were doomed to extinction unless they were protected in some way. For these reasons we started, long ago, making a collection of animals and races of men which we saw were becoming extinct. We have a name for this in our language but you can call it by a name familiar to you—zoological garden.

"It was an easy thing to do. We simply prepared large pits, holes in the earth, somewhat similar to the one at Reelfoot Lake. In each pit we placed a distinct form of life and tried to make the pit as close to its natural conditions

of life as we could.

"For example the mammoth herd is placed in a pit high up in the Himalayas, where it is just cold enough for them to be comfortable and at the same time where there is a warm area to grow their food. We watch the herd carefully and remove all superfluous males. Thus we still have twenty mammoths, exactly the number that we started with.

"All of the reptile sand animals and birds represent species that are at present extinct on the earth's surface. Some have only recently become so. Among the animals we class the original native of Tasmania. Of course he is a variety of Homo but never able to advance much above the lower Palaeolithic culture. He was not a Neanderthal man, only a little better.

"When the Dutch discovered this island there were about five thousand of this race. In eighteen thirty-one there were only two hundred and three. Then we took a hand. Over thirty of the youngest and strongest were removed by us from Flinder's Island. The English thought that the inhabitants were dying fast but that was simply the result of our taking the best breeders.

"In eighteen seventy-six the last Tasmanian died and the race was believed by you to have been exterminated. In reality there are fifty-seven left in our zoological gardens, where we have imitated fairly well their original surroundings.

"We have done this with other peoples. The Australian aborigines are doing fairly well. They are uninteresting to study but were being killed off so rapidly that we considered it worthwhile to give them a home in our gardens. You can see these people some day. In fact, your special province will be their study.

"But these are simply sidelines of our most interesting work. Fully thirty-five thousand years ago we saw the necessity of preserving races that were bound to become extinct. In an isolated portion of Greenland we made a home for the Cro-Magnards. They are doing very well there and seem to be slowly developing mentally. They are fond of reindeer meat and have had no difficulty in adjusting themselves to the climatic conditions.

"With them, we have been able to keep alive the ibex, primitive horse, cave bear and bison. You Middle-Men feel that you know something of the reindeer men from your study of the caves at Altemira, Aurignac and La Magdaleine. What would you think of being actually able to study the living people of the Aurignacian or Solutrean Ages?

"In Switzerland, surrounded by almost inaccessible mountains, we placed a colony of Lake Dwellers. They were fine examples of Neolithic culture but were bound to be destroyed by higher types. We took an entire colony from one of the Swiss lakes twelve thousand years ago and placed it where it could not be destroyed. They are doing very well, indeed.

"Without going into too great detail, that is the plan that we have followed all these centuries. When for any reason we saw fit to destroy a race we preserved a fragment of it, perhaps fifty persons, just enough to enable them to continue their existence. We made it possible for them to go on living the lives that they had become accustomed to. In not a single instance have we interfered with their culture.

"So, you will find in different parts of the world, many of them right here in our Gobi cave system, relics of the dim past, isolated from each other and from the world at large, living in our zoological gardens, our anthropological living museum.

"We will show you a colony of Tyrians —another little group of Carthaginians. Two thousand years before Christ, in your reckoning, we took fifty representative citizens from the city of Knossos on the island of Crete. They are living now as they did then. We even have a colony of Romans, haughty creatures, who are waiting for another

message from their Mother City.

"When Alexander the Great took his Macedonians into Asia, we were able to isolate fifty of his soldiers in a crater in Afghanistan. We took Grecian women to them, and they are now one hundred and seventy in number. That is the way we have cared for these ancient peoples.

"There are perhaps seventy colonies in all and it will be your province to visit them and study them and care for them. We do not want them neglected in any way. We feel a definite responsibility in regard to them. I do not say that we admire any of them. Their culture is so far below ours that we feel they are almost another race.

"However, we are much interested in the modern citizen of the United States —I refer now to the city dweller. The Directing Intelligence feels that in his mode of life and surroundings he is unique. He asked one of the specialists to make a study of his habits and the architect has been doing some work in study and reproducing his buildings.

"We have now ready an apartment house that will hold fifty couples. It is really a very remarkable duplication of a modern one-room apartment building in New York City. We have placed it in a new hole three miles in diameter. Suppose we take an air-machine and visit it?"

WITHOUT further invitation he walked out of the room, followed by Brunton and the two New Yorkers. After a short walk they came out on a landing where the flyer awaited them. The only resemblance that it bore to the airplane of the Middle-Men of 1930 was the fact that both traveled in the air. Then followed an exciting flight over the Gobi Desert and finally a gradual descent into a large hole.

"I think that we had better get into an automobile at once. We have a garage here, well supplied with *Speedwells*. It seemed that nothing less than a seventy-mile-an-hour car would satisfy. I suppose you Middle-Men can drive?"

"I can drive anything," boasted Ormond.

"Very well—get into a car and drive us around this circular track. Drive slowly, for I want to explain matters to you as we go. You see that here we are in the center of what might be called a miniature New York.

"We have a miniature moving-picture theater, a department store for the women to shop in, a delicatessen store and a self-service cafeteria for those who wish to dine out. There is no use of going into the apartment house. It is similar to thousands you saw every day in New York.

"On the other side of this hole is a small office building. You see, we have everything provided for. The women spend the day shopping while the men are at the office. At night they meet and either get their supper at the cafeteria or take it with them in paper bags from the delicatessen store to eat in their apartments. After supper they go driving or visit the movies.

"We made a special study of signboards and I am sure that you will be pleased with them. Look at that one!

CHEW CHERRY GUM
KEEP
JERKING JAWS JAZZING

"Every half mile we have a filling station and at frequent intervals a hot-dog stand. Here and there we have planted violets, dogwood and wild azalea. We expect these to be rapidly torn up by the motorists and replaced by empty tincans, waste paper and trash of all kinds but we will replace the wildflowers every year.

"The question of noise bothered us. We felt that fifty men and women could hardly be expected to make a satisfactory amount, even though each apartment has a radio and an automobile. So, we have placed a hundred noise machines in different parts of the hole. One button turns them all on. And when they are all on you New Yorkers

are going to feel at home.

"Among other things will be this interesting feature—a part of the street will always be torn up. We felt that a finished New York would not be home at all. Also, right across the street from the apartment house is another apartment house. This will always be in the act of being torn down or built. You will always live within the sound of a steel riveter.

"We do not intend to make any change in your social life. That is for you to arrange. We are going to start with fifty men of a high type and their wives in the apartment house—and probably a hundred of the servant class in a tenement house at the other end of the street. You can divorce yourselves and remarry as often as you wish. There is only one stipulation and that is that you must keep up the number of the colony by an appropriate number of childbirths.

"And now I am going to ask the consultant in anthropology what he thinks of such a colony for the purpose of preserving the culture and refinement of the highest type of American citizenship?"

"I have no words to express my approval," replied Brunton. "I stayed for over two weeks in New York, and I feel that you have left little undone for the comfort of the average member of that community."

"It is well that it meets with your approval, for it concerns you rather deeply. We do not want your servants, Wright and Ormond, to be at large. They are not worthy of adoption into our race as we have done with you. We hate to place them with our degenerate workers and we were really at a loss as to their disposal. The thought came to us that we could place them in this colony."

AMONG NEXT ISSUE'S STORIES

THE COSMIC PANTOGRAPH

by EDMOND HAMILTON

CHAPTER XIV

Introductions

EVEN as he spoke another air machine came down from the skies and landed near them. The door of the cabin opened and out stepped two women. The pilot remained inside.

"Come over here," commanded the co-ordinator. "Gentlemen, I want you to meet Miss Joan Summers and Miss Antoinette Carter. Both are of the blond type which we find is popular at present. They are both accustomed to New York life, having spent the last seven winters there.

"Ladies, I want to introduce you to Sir Harry Brunton, late of England but now of our nation. He will do all that he can to see that your stay here is a pleasant one. The other two gentlemen are from New York and are both single. This is Mallory Wright, this is John Ormond."

The two girls stared at the co-ordinator but at last acknowledged the introduction. "Can you tell us the purpose of all this, Sir Harry, and just what has happened to our aunt?" asked Miss Summers.

"My word, yes! Awkward to tell you but your aunt is going to live with me. Wife, no doubt. You ladies are to marry these two New Yorkers and live right here with forty-eight other couples. I do not know which will marry which but you will have lots of time to decide that. If you find you have made a mistake you can change later on."

Miss Summers looked puzzled. "I never heard of such a thing! These men look like nice chaps but we don't want to marry them and I am sure that my aunt does not want to marry you or anyone else. Did she say that she would? Have you seen her?"

"I certainly have. She told me that if I was the last man on earth she would

not marry me—but I think she will have to change her mind."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her that she will be fortunate to have a chance to marry me but that she is going to stay with me anyway. She was very much upset over it but she will cool down when she thinks it over."

"I wonder what the United States government will think about this?" asked Miss Antoinette Carter.

"That is immaterial," the co-ordinator replied. "In a few years there will be no United States, therefore, no government. Consultant, what do you want to do with these four persons?"

"I think they had better go back with us to the Reelfoot Lake cave. I am going to take their aunt there and the six of us can live together and get acquainted with each other. You are not ready as yet to open this New York colony. There are some finishing touches to do and the servants to be secured. Ladies, you will come with me? Your aunt will be with us."

"We are not going to go with you!" cried Miss Carter.

"I think you will! Co-ordinator, I understand that the human experimental laboratories are in this Gobi cave. Take us there. I want these young ladies to see what happens to other women not as fortunate as they."

"Wait a minute!" demanded Miss Summers. "What do you mean?"

"Simply this. These people are always experimenting with disease and germs. They perform these experiments on human beings, men and women like us. They keep them in wire cages like so many white rats and they do as they wish to with them, as we do with rats and monkeys. When they are done they open their bodies and study them and then throw them away. That is what might have been our lot.

"They take women and breed them for experimental purposes—and the odds and ends they use as mere slaves to do the hard work that they do not wish their sensitive delicate machinery to do. When they are worn out they feed them to wild animals. That might have been your lot.

"Instead, you are given the opportunity to marry two very nice fellows and live in a new apartment house with servants, automobiles, stores and restaurants at your command. Why not look at this matter in a sensible way! Your aunt and I will come and weekend with you."

"But it is all so new," whimpered Miss Carter.

"Life is that way. My word! I never thought that I would be a trusted unit in this nation of Conquerors. I have learned more new things in the last week than I ever did in the whole rest of my life. This colony will not be ready for occupancy for some time and till then you are to be my guests. Wright, can't you say something? My word! I thought you New Yorkers were fast workers."

"It is all very embarrassing," murmured the New Yorker.

"What does he mean by that word?" asked the co-ordinator.

"It is an emotion. I thought that no real New Yorker was ever embarrassed but it seems that I am wrong. Suppose we go back to the Directing Intelligence? Or is he through with us?"

"He wants to see you for a minute, Consultant, and then he thinks you had all better go back to Reelfoot."

"Then let us all get into the airplane. I think we shall be able to go in the same plane. It will be more *en famille*."

ONCE again Sir Harry was alone with the Directing Intelligence. "I am not going back to Reelfoot with you," the ruler said. "I have been informed of your activities since you left me to look over our new colony, the miniature New York, and I think that you are wise to take the three women back with you for a little while till the colony is ready for occupancy.

"You have seen our colonies in what we call a living anthropological museum.

I want to say that we have done our best to make these colonies self-supporting and perpetuating. Unless something happens which we have not been able to foresee the Norsemen, the Tasmanians, the Carthaginians will still be in existence ten thousand years from now. Each preserves a splendid isolation from all the others. They live in little worlds of their own between which communication is impossible.

"The inventive mind of the present human race will spoil all this if allowed to follow its present trend. The average scientist of today among the Middle-Men is fond of prying into the waste places of the earth. Only by constant attention to details have we been able so far to prevent him from discovering our colonies, or, for that matter, ourselves.

"I am afraid that as a nation we are becoming decadent. We have not enough aim and ambition left to give us stimulating mental exercise. Perhaps as a race we are reaching our senility. I have entertained doubts at times as to the wisdom of our system of reproduction.

"For some time we have been annoyed by the Middle-Men. They have constantly interfered with our work. What is our work at present? Just this —we have done all we can on this planet. We wish to leave it and explore other worlds.

"We will come back to this earth as a base—but we will add to our activities by conquering space and whatever forms of life we find there. At present we are making machines for interplanetary travel. That was one reason why we wanted the undisturbed possession of a part of the United States.

"When our plans are completed and our machines perfected we will close our caves here on earth, oil and otherwise protect our robots from rust, kill all the earth-slaves that we have in our caves, make final provisions for the comfort of our colonies and zoological gardens and then send on the earth a plague that will, in a month, wipe out the human race, except those men and women who are kept as specimens. Only by doing this can we preserve the secret of our colonies.

"I think that it is a good plan to destroy the Middle-Men. They have not measured up to what we expected of them. Two hundred years ago we took selected specimens and sent them ideas and since then they have gone rapidly into a mechanical and electric age. But they have not made much use of their advantages. We feel that the time has come to destroy them.

"Following our custom we will, in as complete a manner as possible, preserve their so-called culture in our latest colony—one hundred men and women of the higher class and an adequate number of servants. At the proper time we will scatter the death germs over the earth from our air machines, enter our interplanetary machines and seek other intellectual diversions. You will come with us?"

"My word! *Stupendous!* The more I see of your race, the more I admire your intellectual attainments. I am proud to be one of you. But there are still some things that I do not understand; your large hands when you do no work? Your language and your perfect ability to speak in our language? And your remarkable control of your units?"

"All proper questions, and showing that you are far ahead of the average Middle-Man. For long centuries we used our hands a great deal—for we learned that there was a direct connection between the movement of our hands and the development of the brain. Naturally there came a time when our robots were so efficient that it was no longer necessary to employ manual labor. So the muscles have grown flabby but the size of the hands has remained.

"Our speech is different. It is really thought, which as you know is not dependent upon sound. Thus we could communicate, if we wished, with three men in three different languages and be perfectly understood by each, using

only one series of thoughts.

"As for our government it is the most perfect absolutism that has ever been developed on this earth. You Middle-Men have never seen anything like it. Each individual has his own sphere of action in which he is supreme. But for over eighty thousand years, perhaps more, no unit has dared to dispute any matter with the Directing Intelligence. I could order the entire nation to enter the Lethal Chambers and they would go at once without hesitation. Now is there anything else that I can explain to you?"

YES. I am interested in these Middle-Men that you have here. Do they never revolt, attempt to destroy you in search of their freedom? What is their mental condition?"

"Revolt is not unknown to us. Ten thousand years ago we had to kill most of them and start over again. The replacements are very numerous. Some live for five years but many are good workers for only a few months. We thought that if we had as many women as men they might be more content but it made only more trouble. The women wore out too fast. The men killed each other, fighting over the women.

"A century ago we started a new plan. As soon as a Middle-Man or woman is brought down here he or she is operated on and made sexless. As neutrals they work better and last longer. Lately we have been experimenting with mental diseases and have inoculated all of the Middle-Men with the germs of dementia praecox. When this disease develops they make very good workers and become quite strong and fat."

"How many of them would be able to resume their earth life if they were returned?"

"Practically none. Even with those who have been well cared for in the cages of our experimental laboratory there would be an inability to readjust themselves to a surface life. For centuries we have been trying biological experiments to make a new race of workers. I suppose we have used five thousand women of different nationalities in these experiments. At present there are three hundred white females in our biological laboratories. Naturally, they would rather die than return to their families."

"My word! Yes. As usual you are right. They are all better off dead. I suppose that when you kill the rest you will also empty the cages in your laboratories?"

"Yes, they will all be emptied and thoroughly cleaned and sterilized, to make ready for any new specimens that we bring back from other worlds."

"Your whole idea is wonderful!" exclaimed Sir Harry. "When will you start your interplanetary trip?"

"The preparations are nearly completed. Our space machines are examples of mechanical perfection. Trial flights in them have shown the soundness of the engineering details. The same force will be used that is used to drive our tunnel cars, the complete annihilation of small pellets of coal. There is only one factor in our national life that is causing us concern. Till that detail is solved we cannot hope to make a success of our interplanetary conquests."

"As a member of the nation, vitally interested in its welfare, may I ask just what it is that disturbs you?"

"You may. For centuries there has been a constant increase in our intelligence and efficiency. We have probably attained the apex of possible mental growth. But, for over fifteen centuries, there has been a gradually increasing apathy, a disinclination to progress as individuals.

"When a co-ordinator or a Ruling Intelligence feels that the time has come for replacement it is almost impossible to find anyone willing to become a candidate for the position. The situation is especially trying in regard to the Directing Intelligence. As you know, he is the father of the race. There has

come the thought that, due to constant intermarriage and an absence of new blood, perhaps the nation has become decadent.

"The study of the history of the various nations of Middle-Men shows that the average nation lives about fourteen hundred years. We felt that our nation, composed as it was of individuals who would never die were it not for the best interests of the country, might live on forever. But now enters this strange psychic apathy, this unwillingness to assume greater responsibilities. How can it be explained?"

"Pride is one of the emotions you have deprived yourselves of."

"I understand that. But this situation is not to be explained by the absence of the emotion of pride. Take the case of the specialist who was found wandering around our halls in a dazed condition, muttering over and over that he wanted to be led to the Lethal Chamber. There was a case of some form of acute mental disease, and I fear that this same condition exists in a chronic condition among most of our specialists.

"Our psychiatrists have studied a few of the worst examples and feel that, unless we can be confident of correcting this part of our mental life it would be best not to go ahead with our space explorations. Of course, we will follow out the program as far as the destruction of the Middle-Men is concerned."

Sir Harry rubbed the back of his head thoughtfully. "I have done a lot of exploring in Australia," he at last said, "and I met an isolated tribe of Bushmen there who presented some very interesting problems for study. I lived with them nearly a year, finally being able to understand their language well enough to follow their thought.

"They had been completely isolated from all other tribes for so many centuries that every child was the product of the most intensive inbreeding. The entire tribe was related to each other. Their decay was so fast that they have already died out. The remarkable part of their existence was the fact that they did not seem to care what happened. They were without emotion and without incentives.

"By Jove! It occurs to me that those Bushmen had something in common with your nation. There is certainly a psychic resemblance. Perhaps I could, with Wright to help me, do something — but perhaps this is not the time to mention such a possibility."

"I suppose you mean that you could help us?"

"Something like that."

"Perhaps that is what made us bring you here?"

"That might be. But suppose you were able to make this trip into space, explore other worlds besides ours? You still feel that it would be necessary to destroy the Middle-Men?"

"I believe so. They seem so useless and so inefficient. And we may wish to return and take possession of the entire earth."

The Englishman sighed. "If that is all that you want to talk about I must ask you to excuse me. This has been a hard day for me, and I think it would be best to return to our apartments at Reelfoot Lake."

"You have my permission to depart. Think about that psychic apathy and see what can be done about it."

CHAPTER XV

Hopelessness

THE new consultant was leaving the room when the Directing Intelligence called him back. "I wish you would give the matter of headaches a little thought. My cerebral pains are becoming almost disabling at times. I would long ago have allowed myself to be replaced had there been any candidates. I wish you could help me in some way."

The Englishman promised to do his best. The journey back to the Reelfoot Lake cave was a silent one.

Sir Harry Brunton looked old. In his white robe he seemed like a Roman senator, deliberating with sorrow on the debilities of the new generation. He leaned back in his seat, folded his arms and shut his eyes.

Miss Charlotte Carver was equally silent. In spite of her protests she had been bathed and almost disinfected. When it was finished she was forced to admit to herself that she had never been so clean in her entire life. After this she was clad in a single white robe which reached to her ankles. It was warm but even to her old-fashioned ideas absolutely without style. She knew she looked a fright. No wonder her nieces had almost snickered when they first saw her!

The two girls, however, had other things to think of. They had not only been captured, they were being threatened with life in an insane asylum, called a "New York miniature colony," as wives of two New Yorkers, who had also been captured. The whole arrangement seemed like a dream. The worst part of it was that the two men were evidently as opposed to the marriage as the women were. No courtesies had been exchanged since the introduction. The girls thought that the boys might at least be civil.

The two men were not to blame. Their past life in New York had been but a poor preparation for the adventures they had been through since they had left the metropolis. The most depressing part was a constantly-growing despair. They realized that their captors were indeed "Conquerors." Whatever these strange people planned they accomplished.

They felt doomed. They were not native born, but they had lived in New York long enough to love the city in spite of its defects. They felt that the model was a pitiless caricature of everything that was bad and useless in the metropolitan life. Surely all of New York was not like that. It was not fair.

Wright determined that he would show them. They had made a city for a hundred persons of the better classes and in a tenement house they were going to put a hundred or more servants. He was going to be mayor of that city and then he would show them! Those silly signs were going to come down and be used for firewood. The wild flowers would be cultivated and the whole pit made into a gorgeous natural park. There would be an end to the hot-dog stands and the cooking would all be done in the homes.

Ormond sat moodily, his chin pressed down on his collar, and now and then swore softly to himself. Taking everything into consideration it was not a very merry party.

AT LAST they were back in the rooms Sir Harry Brunton had called his apartment. Miss Charlotte Carter had done a lot of hard thinking and had made up her mind to open the conversational game.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. Brunton or Sir Harry or whatever you call yourself. These girls are my nieces, one by blood, the other by adoption. I am responsible for their being in this trouble.

"I want to make a bargain with you. I will stay here with you. That does not mean that I like you any more than I did yesterday. It does not mean anything. It simply means that we won't be fighting all the time. It does not make any odds to me whether you marry me or not.

"I think that, if I have to spend my life down here with these monstrosities and wear this kind of clothing, nothing that happens to me will make any difference. But I promise you that I will be as nice to you as I can if only you will let these poor girls go back to their parents and the sweet sunshiny earth again. Will you?"

The young women rushed to her and

started to kiss her.

"You sweet thing!" Miss Summers cried. "Do you think we would let you make that kind of a sacrifice for us? Not at all! I was just going to make the same proposition. We girls will stay with these two men and help them start their silly old colony if only they set you free. I suppose Sir Harry is a nice enough man. But at your age—"

"My dear child! Why do you say 'at my age'? Please remember that I am the youngest of my family and, in spite of the fact that my hair is white, I am only ten years older than you. *No!* If anyone makes the sacrifice it must be me. I think this man is going to be a gentleman even if he does look like a fool in that bathrobe."

At this Miss Antoinette Carter started to laugh and then cry. It was too much for Ormond. He had sisters at home. Awkwardly he put his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Don't do that, Miss Carter, please don't. It is bad enough as it is for all of us without breaking down. We are going to do everything we can for you and the other ladies—though just what we can do is a question. Don't mind our friend and the way he talks. He has a very important position with the new government and, of course, he has to do what is expected of him."

When Mallory found how nicely his friend was taking care of an awkward situation and a beautiful girl he lost no time in trying to be equally courteous to Miss Joan Summers. Sir Harry looked on in silence. At last he started to grin.

"It seems to me, Miss Carter, that perhaps your proposed sacrifice for your nieces would not be appreciated."

And even the former professor of anthropology was forced to admit to herself that worse things might have happened to the girls than be made to marry these two men and live in a colony.

But the Englishman had some things to say to his companions. He lost no time in asking them to sit as close together as they could and listen to him. The girls were feeling much better by this time and had even found that they knew some people in New York whom the two younger men knew and had seen a good many of the same shows.

"My word! but this is an odd situation to be in," began Sir Harry, "and I am not sure that I shall be able to make myself understood. But here's trying. We are all here together in the same boat. We may think that we are in tough luck—but our situation is Paradise compared with the poor men and women who are down here as slaves.

"As you know, I am what you might call a Conqueror myself. I had nothing to do with Miss Charlotte Carter's being brought here and I was as much surprised as she was when I found out just why they did it. I have never married. I never found a lady who would look at me twice. So I have spent my time just wandering. I have money but I never had a real home. My parents died when I was young and after that I had neither kith nor kin.

"It looks as though I were going to stay here. If Miss Carter wants to stay with me as a fellow scientist I promise her that she will be treated with the greatest respect. In England I was known as a man and here I am the first Middle-Man to be given the rights of a Conqueror. I do not say this boastfully but I want Miss Carter to know that I have been considered a gentleman all my life. She will find me one.

"Now in regard to these young people. Their condition might be worse than it is. Unless something unexpected happens the Middle-Men in the New York Colony will be the only members of our race alive. In that colony they will lead the lives of pampered pets. The Conquerors will do all that they can to make the life of that colony secure and successful. So far as I can see they have neglected nothing.

"I am going to keep you five people right here with me for a while. Things may happen in the future that seem odd

but always remember that I have your interests at heart. I would like to do something for the slaves—but their doom is sealed. Now, how about a jolly six-handed game of poker—or would you rather play bridge while I tell your aunt about the colony of Tasmanians?"

THE next morning, immediately after breakfast, Sir Harry took Mallory Wright to one side.

"Listen, my lad. I brought you along to have the services of a true scientist if the need for one arose. Well, to make short work of a long subject, let me say that there is something for us to do. I think that you and I have it in our power to do something rather fine if only we can put it across. Did you ever do any biochemistry?"

"A little, working with serums and antitoxins."

"You are at home in a chemical laboratory?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then we will get busy. There is no doubt that these people have the laboratory and everything in it that is necessary for our work. Suppose we tell Ormond to entertain the ladies? We will put in some hard work in experimentation. I shall have to leave most of the actual work to you but I will give you the ideas."

"What are we going to do?"

"First, study these Conquerors. It is no secret that they are sick. We must find out just what that disease is and the cause of it. Then we must find a cure. When we have that cure, then we can start in to play poker."

"*Poker?*"

"Yes, with our race as the stake. Your nation and mine—their future destiny. My word! What a game that will be!"

Wright's jaws tightened. "I'll do my best!" he said tensely.

The Englishman slapped him on the back. "Good lad!" he muttered. "I knew you would. True gold is your metal."

From that morning on the three ladies and Ormond saw little of their friends except at mealtimes—and even then they were not very satisfactory table companions. A complete laboratory had been constructed in one of the rooms in the apartment and there the two men, with various specialists to assist them, spent most of their time.

Sir Harry felt safe in having these Conquerors assist him. They had certain knowledge that was valuable to him but they seemed curiously unable to value or apply their knowledge. The specialist in organic chemistry realized that fact and commented on it to Wright one day.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that our knowledge is very complete. But for many years it has seemed to be almost useless. Our specialist in statistics told us at a recent annual meeting that our inventions are now only three one-hundredths as numerous per century as they were five thousand years ago.

"Of course we might say, as a defensive reply, that there is hardly anything left to invent. But that would not be true. We simply have reached a point at which we do not use the knowledge we have. Either we cannot use it or we lack the psychic urge to do so.

"Perhaps, if some great calamity overpowered us, it would act as a mental stimulus but otherwise—oh, well—it seems that we do not care. And so we simply spend our days in rehearsing the knowledge we have and our nights in broken slumber, disturbed by headaches."

His story was but a variation of the confession made by the Directing Intelligence to Sir Harry. The leader of the nation had not exaggerated the difficulty. It was apparent to most of the specialists that something very serious was wrong with the psychic life of the nation.

Day by day Sir Harry and Mallory Wright worked on. They made an intensive study of the ichor, the fluid that flowed through the circulatory system of the Conquerors instead of the rich red blood of the normal human being.

They studied this ichor from every possible point of attack. At times Wright became so tired of this mysterious ichor that he rebelled at any further study. But the Englishman urged him on.

"Hang onto it, Mallory, old top. Bite into it and clamp your jaws. Right there is the thing we are after, the hidden ace that is going to win our poker game for us. It is their blood—and blood means life. My word! I know that little girl is hungry for your companionship but you must work."

And Wright would wipe his worried brow and start to work again.

One day the specialist in bacteriology came sauntering into the laboratory. His face was as emotionless as the faces of all the race but in his eyes there was a peculiar glitter.

"I have felt better for a whole week," he told Sir Harry. "For months I have done but little work. A few days ago I started and now I am through. I have discovered and perfected a strain of microbes, deadly bacilli, that will so quickly destroy the Middle-Men that they will all be dead before they realize what is wrong with them.

"The rest will be easy. All we have to do is to make a large amount and scatter it over the earth from our airplanes. The making of a preventive to give to the human beings in our various colonies will be easy. Of course we do not want them to die with the other Middle-Men."

"I guess the human race is better off dead," commented Sir Harry. "It seems that they have not merited the right to survive."

"No, they are doomed," replied the specialist as he sauntered out of the laboratory.

"From now on," whispered the Englishman to Wright, "we work alone—and when I say work I mean it!"

LOOK FORWARD TO

VIA ASTEROID

By GORDON A. GILES

NEXT ISSUE

CHAPTER XVI

Anxious Days

BUT it seemed that their very need, their overwhelming desire to accomplish their purpose, thwarted them. Again and again they seemed on the verge of success only to be again faced by failure. It remained for Miss Charlotte Carter to break through the hard surface of the scientific enigma and give them a starting point toward success.

"Something has to be done," she announced emphatically. "Time is passing and whatever dangers we face are growing more and more threatening. You two men have become absolutely antisocial. You act as though no one existed except yourselves. I think that we ought to talk the problems over and see if we cannot help you. You have spent so much time in worried thinking that there is just a possibility of your brains becoming dull."

The Englishman finally agreed. He realized that such a procedure had its dangerous elements. Suppose they were being carefully watched all the time by the television machine? It might end in the death of all of them. At the same time, he knew that there was a great deal of truth in what the lady from Virginia said. So he yielded.

There was another conference. Ormond, as usual, was polishing his big rifle. The two young women sat next to each other. They were more interested in the development of the New York Colony than in the experimental work that was being performed in test tubes. Mallory Wright sat for the greater part of the discussion with his face buried in his arms on the table. He was tired and mentally exhausted. Even Sir Harry talked with the greatest effort in order to put the problem in such shape that Miss Charlotte Carter would understand.

"My dear sir. How simple! You have been trying to make a compound which, injected into the circulation of these dwarfs, will restore their mental poise, give them inspiration to do their work and solve their problems. You have been working at it from the standpoint of their internal secretions. Terrible!

"They lack something and you have it. I suppose you know by this time the exact composition of their blood. Make a similar examination of ours and determine the difference. See what there is that you have which they lack. Put those missing elements into a compound and inject it into them."

"But—my word! Miss Carter! Clever and all that—but there are twenty thousand of them. It would exsanguinate me to furnish them all with my blood."

"I never thought that you would. I simply said that you should find the difference and make a compound out of your blood—just enough for an analytical study. Then make a formula of that compound and produce it synthetically in the laboratory. Memorize the formula and never, never put it down on paper. Try it, Harry. Oh, I *wish* that you would let me help you!"

After that work started anew. The three, for now Miss Carter spent her days in the laboratory, began to work with new vigor. She had given them a possible solution of the puzzle and with that new thought to work on their progress was rapid. In a week, they had the compound formed out of Sir Harry's blood. In three more days they knew its exact composition and in another week they had made about a gallon—enough to cure over a hundred of the dwarfs of their psychic apathy.

The last few days Sir Harry insisted on doing all the work himself. He explained to his companions that something might happen to Wright and it would be necessary for the work to go on.

THEY had been able to manufacture a synthetic serum which they believed would solve the secret of the decadence of this strange race. Ormond, in one of his few periods of loquacity, made no effort to hide his idea of the folly of such a step.

"Give them time," he explained to Miss Antoinette, "and they will find that we have double-crossed them. If I had been Sir Harry I would have bluffed them, delayed the laboratory work, done everything I could to put them off from month to month and never, never have deliberately produced a drug that would make them more efficient than they are already."

"What is this poker game he is always talking about, John?"

"That poker game is like my elephant gun. It is just a specimen of his humor. He told me to take my elephant gun—said that one could never tell what need there might be for it. Once a day since then he has asked me if the gun is in good condition. Have I shot it? I have not! That is the way with this poker game. Just an example of his English humor."

Perhaps Sir Harry knew how some of his party felt—but if he did he showed no signs of it. He simply went on with his work. With Miss Charlotte beside him constantly he was brighter than before, smiled a little, even laughed at times. Then one day he filled a glass syringe with the new solution, carefully placed it and a sterilized needle in his pocket, said good-bye to his co-workers and went out.

The time had come to play poker.

Three hours later he was sitting at a table around which were grouped the Directing Intelligence and the three Co-ordinators.

Sir Harry lost no time in telling them the reason back of his asking for the conference.

"Some months ago the ruler of your nation took me into his confidence. He stated that our nation, for you know that I have been made a Conqueror by adoption, is threatened with a situation so serious that, until it can be solved, all thoughts of the exploration of space

would have to be abandoned. He asked me to try to do something.

"First, let me take up the less serious conditions. Your queens have a condition known among my former race as hyperthyroidism. It is nothing more nor less than an enlargement and oversecretion of the thyroid gland in the neck. I am sure that the condition is the result of an excess of iodine in their food and water.

"Give them quinine hydrobromate to reduce their pulse rate, add extract of ergot if necessary, take the excess of iodine away from their food and water. I am content that their health will be so greatly improved that the future units of our race will be healthier in every way.

"The second minor problem is the one of your constant headaches. As I have reason to know from my past studies your brains are very large. Consequently, the blood vessels in your skulls are huge and I believe that the pressure of circulation is the main cause of the headaches. I will take that up with the specialist in medicine and suggest to him the proper treatment—though I am sure that just as soon as I give him the hint he will be able to go ahead. I am just surprised that he was not able to see what was the matter himself."

The Directing Intelligence slowly turned his head until his large dilated eyes were fastened on the Englishman. Then he spoke.

"There is no reason for your being surprised. He has had the same mental inertia that has overcome all of us. Our stagnation has become almost complete. For over a thousand years our space machines have waited, unoccupied, for the completion of our program.

"Some of our specialists have been seriously ill, others have just been mentally dull, not one of us has been normal —by that I mean the norm of our race ten thousand years ago. Our replacements have been many but not in the positions of trust and responsibility. I want to give you an example. I will send for the specialist in medicine and show you just why he was unable to solve these problems that seem to your active mind to be so easy."

After fifteen minutes of waiting the specialist in medicine walked into the room and took a chair at the table. "Have you any reports to make?" asked the Directing Intelligence.

"None."

"One hundred years ago I asked you to make a thorough study of the queens and see what was necessary to improve their health. Have you done that?"

"I have. But I am unable to solve the problem of their illness."

"Have you arrived at any idea as to the cause of my own headaches?"

"No. I have the same trouble myself. I try to work on these questions. I know all about medicine that was ever known by our nation. But for some reason I seem to be unable to use that knowledge efficiently."

The Directing Intelligence turned to Sir Harry. "This is a very good illustration of why the interplanetary journey has been postponed for hundreds of years."

"I understand. But suppose I have a drug that will restore his mental vitality, make him capable of using the vast store of knowledge he undoubtedly possesses? If I can do that with him will you believe that I am capable of doing the same to the entire race?"

"I will believe. If it can be done with one it can be done with all. But have you the drug?"

"I have. I brought one dose of it with me."

"You have my permission to give it to this specialist."

BRUNTON walked over to the physician and rolled up his sleeve. From one pocket he took out a rubber tube, which he applied above the elbow as a tourniquet. From another pocket he took out the sterilized needle and the syringe. Then he painted the skin in the fold of the elbow with a red anti-

septic. Already the veins were beginning to be prominent.

"I have in this syringe," began Sir Harry, almost as though he were lecturing to a class of students, "twenty cubic centimeters, of a serum which I intend to give through the vein. Thus it will enter the circulation at once and in a few minutes the nervous system, especially the brain. I believe that one dose will be sufficient to establish the potency of the drug.

"Of course, later on it may be necessary to repeat the treatment—but that is a matter of secondary importance. Now I will puncture the vein slowly and empty the syringe into it. The operation, as you see, is practically painless. There! It is all over. Now I hope in a couple of weeks we will see the results."

The next two weeks that passed were filled with the most terrible anxiety for the six earth-beings. Attempts at gayety fell flat as all waited under growing tension for a call from the Directing Intelligence. It was understood that the specialist who had been treated was to remain in isolation during the period so that the effect of the medicine might be more properly evaluated.

At last the call came. A white-faced Sir Harry Brunton, barely able to maintain his jaunty air, found himself in the presence of the Directing Intelligence, his co-ordinators and the treated specialist. Throughout the room a deathlike silence reigned until the Directing Intelligence spoke to the specialist.

"How do you feel?"

"Somehow I feel better. My mind seems to be clearing. Now in regard to that problem of the health of the queens. There is no doubt that they are receiving too much iodine and that has caused an overproduction of thyroid juice. We will give them quinine hydrobromate, reduce the iodine content in their diet—and I feel sure that they will soon be well."

"How about the headaches?" asked the Directing Intelligence.

"I see the cause now. The blood pressure is too high. Nitrates will reduce the pressure and cure the headaches."

"I asked you the same question many years ago. You took a long time to answer."

"I realize that. But I could not think then. I can now. This new medicine has given me wonderful vitality, mental alertness, an ability to use my accumulated knowledge. In someway I feel that I have been sick but I am all right now. I feel as if I were a new man."

Sir Harry began to smile. "My word! It worked as expected!"

"It did," acknowledged the Directing Intelligence. "How soon can you start in treating the entire nation?"

The Englishman rose to his full height. He towered above the seated dwarfs.

"There are a few things that I want to make clear. In the first place I am the only living person who knows how to prepare this drug. I have enough to treat about one hundred persons. After that it will be necessary to make more and I am the only one who can do it. I want you to understand that fact. I am the only one. Now I am anxious to make enough to cure the entire nation, because I want you to go on that interplanetary journey and I want to go with you. In fact I think that you need me."

"But life as I see it is largely a matter of compromises, gives and takes. Of course you have ruled so long that you can see no viewpoint except your own. I want to help you but I want to be paid. I want you to promise me that you will make no effort to kill the Middle Men, the race I come from, till we return from the space trip. There will be time enough then to deal with them as you wish.

"The second request is for permission to liberate my five fellows and send them back to their comrades and their civilization. I am sure that they can be trusted to keep their adventures here a secret. In fact I will myself be a bond to make sure of that. If you will grant me these two requests I will start at

once making enough of the drug to cure the entire nation of this peculiar devasting mental illness."

Though they were incapable of showing emotion by facial change there was a deadly glitter in the eyes of the dwarfs who looked up at him. The Directing Intelligence expressed their thought.

"Impossible! Why should we bargain? You are here and in our power. Suppose we force you to show us how to make the drug and then kill all of you?"

"You can do a part of that—but remember, I am the only one who knows every step of the process whereby this drug is made. If I do not make it it will not be made. I anticipated your refusal, so I came prepared to play what we call poker with you.

"I hold in my hand a thin glass vial, containing a few drops of a deadly poison. I am going to place it between my teeth. If you refuse to agree with my suggestion I will crash the glass and die. Then, where will you be?"

He placed a large glass bead in his mouth and closed his lips.

HE SAT down and faced them. For five minutes there was a conflict of wills, a battle of intellects. Then the Directing Intelligence spoke. "We will grant your requests. After all, we need a person like you with us when we take the journey into space. You have something that even the best of us lack—perhaps it is youth.

"I will give orders that the Middle-Men be not harmed. The New York Colony will remain closed and your five companions will be liberated—on condition that you remain with us, make enough of the drug to cure the race and take the journey into space when our nation starts on its explorations of the unknown."

Sir Harry took the glass bead out of his mouth and put it in his pocket. "That's a bargain," he replied. "I am confident that it is the best thing to do for everybody."

"By the way," asked the Directing Intelligence. "You said that this was a poker game. What did you mean by that?"

The Englishman took out the little glass bead and rolled it on the table.

"My word! Had to explain. Poker is one of those American games. It is built on a bluff. You pretend at times to have cards when your hand is devilish poor. Take that glass bead, for example. It is solid. No poison in it. Well, I must go. I am going to be busy, making over nineteen thousand doses of that medicine. You can go on with the program now and have the definite assurance that everything will be all right."

He walked out of the room. The dwarfs looked at each other. One of the co-ordinators broke the silence.

"He is a very capable man. Knowing one thousandth of what we knew he was still able to make such good use of his little knowledge that he won the game of poker—as he so peculiarly expressed it. Well, our word is passed and after all we can kill those Middle-Men when we return from our voyage through space. For we know now that we are going and we know that we will return."

The Directing Intelligence added, "At least we know that a capable consultant is going with us."

CHAPTER XVII

A National Treatment

THE Englishman returned to his five companions. Ormond was still polishing the elephant gun. The two young women were whispering to each other. Wright was trying to console the elder Miss Carter, who was crying.

"Cherrio!" cried Sir Harry. "What mean these tears at the point of victory? 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at its flood leads on

to fortune' and we are all swept with that tide to a happy ending of our adventure. You are going home—do you understand? Back to the States and your little old New York. The game of poker was played and we won."

"Yes, Harry," said Miss Charlotte, amid her sobs. "We know all about the way you won. We had you under observation in the television machine from the time you left us till you started to come back. We know what you did to secure our freedom. It was nothing much, was it?

"Just a promise on your part that you would go with them to Mars or Saturn or Venus or wherever it is they are going. Just a promise that you would stay with them till you died of old age—and all to get liberty for us. What do you suppose that I—I mean, what do you suppose *we* care about New York if we know all the time that you are with these horrid monstrosities?"

"Now, Miss Charlotte," pleaded the Englishman, "please do not talk that way. I am sorry you used the television screen. My word! Your scolding me that way makes me feel like wilted lettuce. And all the time I was thinking that I had done something worth while in securing your liberty and saving the human race, at least for a little while."

"It was fine," chimed in Wright. "You were wonderful but Miss Charlotte naturally feels that all of us ought to have stuck together in this adventure."

"I do not want you to look at it that way. You should consider the welfare of our race, the men and women, the Middle-Men, who are trying to make a success out of life by attaining to happiness and are making such a botch of it. You go back to them. Go back as missionaries. Show them that there is something more in life than just fame and wealth. Try to develop a spirit of national sacrifice, a unified soul that will be able to face any threatening danger and triumph.

"Now let us go to the laboratory. Just as soon as we make enough serum and give it I am going to send you five dear people back home. You will help me, won't you, Miss Carter?"

"I'll help all I can but nevertheless I despise you for the way you are acting."

"And I suppose," said Ormond, "that while you are working, I can go ahead and polish the elephant gun and take the ladies on sightseeing expeditions?"

"Don't forget the elephant gun," advised Sir Harry, laughing.

For the next week the three scientists worked long hours in the laboratory. Over nineteen thousand doses of the life-restoring drug were ready for use. Word was sent to the Directing Intelligence to assemble the nation at the Reelfoot Crater. Five days later every unit was present—the Directing Intelligence, the Co-ordinators, the specialists and the directors.

Often in the past they had assembled to witness the peculiar rites of their nation and watched long lines of discards pass silently and without emotion into the lethal chamber. Now, for the first time, they had gathered for a constructive purpose. Word had been sent that they were all to be given a dose of a new serum that would restore the intellectual vitality of the nation.

After that they would all go into space—greater achievements, to larger glories and conquests. They were emotionless but one and all they were doing a lot of thinking. Even the dullest among them realized that it was an occasion that promised much for the future of their nation. Sir Harry, Mallory Wright and Miss Charlotte stood near spotless tables, where they were assisted by a number of specialists who had received their treatments a few days before.

Then the line of dwarfs, headed by the Directing Intelligence and the co-ordinators, began to move forward. Each unit, as he passed the table, was given an intravenous injection of the serum. Hour after hour they passed while, hundred by hundred, the nation was restored to vitality and mental

vigor. Muscles ached, brains reeled, the limit of endurance was reached—still the three scientists kept on and at last, nearly dropping from fatigue, they reached the end of their labor. The entire nation of Conquerors had been treated.

SIR Harry told Wright to take Miss Charlotte back to the apartment. Then he walked, his body showing utter exhaustion, up to the chair where sat the Directing Intelligence.

"My part of the contract has been fulfilled," he whispered. "My word, but it was a greater task than I thought it would be. Tomorrow I want to send the five back to their homes and their friends. Will it be all right?"

"It will be all right. Bring them to the edge of the crater. The radio-controlled boat will be in readiness for them. Place them and their baggage in that boat and I will see that they are taken to Tiptonville. From there they will find their own way. They will not be harmed. You, Sir Harry, have won the undying gratitude of our nation. You shall be repaid by being permitted to go with us into space."

"That will be quite jolly."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! That is an emotion. You could not understand but I shall be glad to go. Remember, you have promised not to destroy the Middle-Men till you return."

"I remember. Now I must start to prepare for the trip. I feel new life, new mental vigor. The entire nation will have new life. I suppose you will want to spend the rest of your time with your companions before they leave?

"Yes, I will go and say good-bye to them."

"You show no emotion at the thought of leaving them?"

"I am too tired to show anything."

* * * * *

"So tomorrow," Sir Harry concluded, "you five people are going to get in the little boat and go back to Tiptonville. From there you can get to New York. Once there communicate with the British Consul and he will pay you. Wright, you go over to London as soon as you can, and see the Prime Minister and give him an outline of these weeks. I suppose the President of your country will be interested.

"Tell him that I consider that there is no immediate danger but they should consider the future years very carefully and see what they can do. I do not want any offensive taken against the people who have adopted me."

"And are you going to stay with them all the rest of your life?" asked Miss Charlotte Carter in a low tone.

"I think so. I gave them my word of honor to do so for as long as they need me and want me. That was one of the prices I paid for your liberty. You five can go back now to—your loved ones—"

"Oh! How clever you are—back to our loved ones!" She left the room, saying over her shoulder: "You must excuse me. I shall be so busy packing that I will probably not see you again till the little boat starts for Tiptonville. Goodbye."

"Auntie is decidedly disturbed," commented Miss Antoinette.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Englishman.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you. Do you know I think Englishmen are the most stupid persons in the world? Why, Mallory and John saw what was the trouble with us girls right away and they have just been wonderful."

"My word! You make me feel like—" But he never finished that sentence, for Miss Antoinette jumped up and faced him.

She cried, "If you dare to say 'wilted lettuce' again, I'm going to scream or do something worse. I think without exception you are the dumbest coldest most stupid man that ever was created and you have just about made poor Aunt Charlotte half insane over you."

She left the room.

"Ormond," asked Sir Harry, "do you know what these women are talking about?"

"I don't know and I don't care," growled Ormond. "I think you have acted like a fool in giving in to these dwarfs the way you have. We might have made a fight for it. Think how it makes me look. Going back to Washington and New York and telling them that we left you here for the rest of your life, practically a prisoner.

"They will ask where our guns were and why didn't we make a fight and I will have to say, 'Oh! Yes, we had firearms. Why, I had an elephant gun and Sir Harry wouldn't let me use it!' Think of it! Carrying that gun from New York here and back to New York again and never having a chance to make use of it! All you have told me to do the last month was just to take care of the ladies and make them happy and take them on picnics. And—oh hell!"

BRUNTON spent the rest of the day and much of that night in conference with Mallory Wright over his report. There were things that he wanted told and other things that he felt had better be ignored. The big thing was the fact that the human race was safe, at least for the time being.

The next day came, as all next days come, at the end of twenty-four hours. The six companions walked down the earthen steps to the motorboat. Their baggage had been carried there earlier in the day. Orders had been given that during those minutes when the five said good-bye to Sir Harry they were to be left alone.

It was a beautiful day, and the two girls and the New Yorkers were almost jolly in spite of their sadness over leaving Sir Harry. A double wedding was to be celebrated in New York as early that fall as arrangements could be made for it. The four young people were very much in love. They stepped into the boat, rearranged their baggage, waited for Miss Charlotte. She stood on the bottom step, alongside Sir Harry.

"Come on, Auntie," cried the girls.

Just then the boat started to leave the shore.

"You'll have to hurry," cried Wright.

But the little lady scientist simply smiled and drew nearer to the Englishman's side. Twenty feet of water lay between the boat and the step.

"Good-bye, girls," Miss Charlotte Carter said gayly. "Give my love to the family and I hope the four of you will be very, very happy."

"But what are you going to do, auntie?" shouted one of the girls.

The little woman made a speaking trumpet out of her hands as she shouted back over the water, "*What—does—it—look—like?*"

"My word! Miss Charlotte, what does it mean?"

She looked up at his bewildered face

[*Turn page*]

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and smiled as she stroked his arm. "It means that I am going to stay with you —all your life—here or on any other planet—and I am doing it because I love you—you poor stupid dear."

"Do you know how this makes me feel?"

"Oh! I suppose like wilted lettuce or overripe strawberries or something but I hope that you soon will feel like—a man in love. You do love me, don't you, Harry?"

"My word, Yes. *Yes*! Let's go back to the apartment and start the television things. I want to keep in touch with those young people till they are safe."

Back in the apartment they darkened the lights and turned on the picture. The boat was shown, rapidly darting through the curving water lanes and finally landing at the dock at Tiptonville. The four young folks jumped out, divided the baggage and started to walk down the road. Turning on the sound portion of the machine, Sir Harry and Miss Charlotte heard enough to know that, in spite of regrets over leaving two of the party in the crater, still the four on their way to New York were in the best of spirits.

Suddenly there came from the screen the sound of a loud baying and from over the crest of a hill a savage dog ran rapidly toward the little group of travelers. John Ormond fell on one knee, swung around his elephant gun, took aim and fired. The dog disappeared with the explosion. Ormond stood up and started to smile as he patted the gun lovingly.

"*Oh*! This adventure is ending *perfectly*!" cried Miss Charlotte as she threw her arms around her man. "Just think! All six of us going to marry and poor John Ormond finally had a chance to use that gun."

"Righto!" agreed the Englishman, kissing her.

"And perhaps when we all gather for a grand reunion," said the little lady scientist from Virginia as she buried her face in her lover's coat, "perhaps we can get him to tell our grandchildren how he killed an elephant, Harry, dear."

"My word!" whispered the Englishman as he scattered kisses on her white hair. "You make me feel like a Conqueror."

And he turned off the television.

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WORLD'S PHARAOH

By KELVIN KENT

Pete Manx only consented to go back to Ancient Egypt at gunpoint—but when he got there, how he upset history!

PETE Manx had a headache. The headache's name was Dr. Horatio Mayhem. The worthy doctor was driving customers away from Pete's lucrative concession in Funland.

"Shoot till you win!" Pete bawled. "Knock over a milk bottle—it's easy. Prizes for one and all! You can't lose!"

Mayhem's small scrawny figure bobbed about excitedly. "A word with

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you, Mr. Manx. I must have a word with you."

"Shoot till you win!" Pete squalled —and to Mayhem, "Go 'way. You bother me. Prizes for—"

Mayhem took out a wallet big enough to choke a politician and began to count out vast quantities of currency. Pete gulped, stared at the money and beckoned to his shill.

"Take over, Joe. I'll be back. C'mon, Doc." His squat form vaulted the counter. He collected Mayhem and the dough and led the jittery man of medicine to a quiet spot behind the booth. "Now spit it out. What's eating you?"

"I need your help," Mayhem said. "I'm in trouble."

Pete's gaze clung lovingly to the greenbacks. "Yeah?"

"I'll pay you well. Just for a little bit of help. Not much. A—an experiment."

"Whoa!" Pete said, backing away. "You tried that on me before. Sending me back to Rome in your time machine. Landing me in a circus full of starving lions. Ixnay. Not for me—not twice."

"It isn't a time machine," Mayhem snapped. "There's no such thing. My device simply sends your consciousness into the central time-hub around which time itself revolves. You didn't travel in time. Your mind merely took possession of the brain and body of a Roman citizen."

Pete laughed bitterly. "Yeah. Me and your pal Professor Aker. I still think it was a dirty trick—sending us both back in time like that."

AT MENTION of Aker's name Mayhem had turned slightly green. He hesitated, licked his lips, finally said, "Uh—that's just the trouble, Pete. The professor and I got in a slight—er—argument. He contended my device was a fake—claimed it was hypnotic in nature. Ha! I—well—I had occasion to prove my point."

"Oh-oh," Pete whistled. "I bet you sent the prof back to Rome again."

"Not exactly," Mayhem denied, looking worried. "Egypt was his destination."

"A nice place for a vacation. I hear the weather's swell there. Pyramids and stuff, huh?"

"Egypt was a slightly different place under the Pharaohs. A bit—er—savage. The professor is a rather impractical man, I fear. A man of science, true, but he hasn't sense enough to come in out of the rain."

"Does it rain in Egypt?" Pete asked blandly, then, without waiting for an answer, went on, "Your machine works both ways, don't it? Why don't you bring the prof back?"

"I can't," Mayhem moaned. "Time is curved, like space, and I should be able to bring him back. But the device had a breakdown. It'll take weeks to repair. I can still send minds into the past but I can't bring them back.

"Not till I've got a certain part that has to come from London and even then it'll take time. Aker got into all sorts of trouble in Rome, you know. He may be killed before I can get him back from Egypt."

"Well, I won't rat." Pete grunted. "And they can't hang a murder rap on you without a stiff. Cheer up."

"But everybody knows I experimented on Aker. They're asking questions already. Pete, you got along all right in Rome. I want you to go back to Egypt, find Aker and keep an eye on him till I get the machine fixed."

"Glad to have seen you again," Pete said. "Good-by."

"You won't do it?"

"Do I look like I just got out of the ninny-bin?"

"Ninny-bin?"

"Booby-hatch. Nut-house. Don't you understand English?"

"Yes," Mayhem said with wasted irony. "I understand English. And I'll pay you five thousand dollars to help me out."

Pete shook his head slowly. "I could

use that *dinero*. I could go to New York and open a concession at the World's Fair. Cripes, if it was anything else—but it's suicide. Not for little Pete. Sorry, Doc."

Pete turned away. Then he stopped. Something was digging painfully into the small of his back. He stood perfectly still.

"I didn't think it of you, Doc," he said reproachfully. "Pulling a rod on me. It ain't friendly."

"You," Dr. Mayhem observed, "are going to—er—take a ride with me. The gun will be in my pocket. If you make any outcry I shall shoot you in the most painful spot I can. If you keep quiet you'll get five thousand dollars eventually."

"It will buy me a swell tombstone," Pete said thoughtfully.

"Shut up," Mayhem requested. "And start walking."

It was not a nice-looking laboratory. Pete wondered why scientists always had a lot of wires and cables and such stuff around. Probably for a front, he decided. As a barker of some years' standing Pete knew the value of a good front.

Right now he sat uncomfortably in a metal chair, straps holding him firmly by wrists and ankles, and wondered when the Doc was going to turn on the juice. Mayhem was doing horrible things to a switchboard in the corner.

Pete shuddered and said wistfully, "It ain't right. You know it ain't, Doc."

"Shut up."

"I'm a free citizen of the United States of America. I know my rights and you can't—"

"You'll be a citizen of Egypt as soon as this tube warms up. Damn that rheostat."

Not knowing what a rheostat was Pete did not answer. Finally he burst out, "Hey Doc! I just remember I can't talk Egyptian."

"You won't have to," Mayhem explained. "I've improved my device since I sent you to Rome. When your mind enters the brain of an Egyptian it will automatically hook up with the memory center. That's as well as I can explain it to *you*. I don't quite understand it myself. You'll be able to talk and understand Egyptian, all right."

"It ain't right," Pete said glumly. "You can't get away from that."

Mayhem attacked an insulator. "Now remember what I told you. I can't bring you or Aker back for weeks. It'll be your job to find him and keep him out of trouble till I get my repairs done. All set?"

"*No!*" Pete cried in a heartfelt manner.

Bang!

Mayhem had pressed a button. Things began to happen with unpleasant promptitude. Pete's inner consciousness suddenly fled from his unprepossessing body and was projected into another time-sector . . .

ONCE to his regret Pete Manx had sampled a curious concoction made chiefly of tequila, vodka and absinthe. His sensations were rather similar now. Only the elevator was spinning around instead of rising and falling.

Then he decided it wasn't an elevator. It was his brain, revolving rapidly inside his throbbing skull. Pete had never heard of centrifugal force but he was worried about how long his abused brain would be able to hang together.

He opened his eyes and looked at the biggest room he had ever seen. Towering pillars upheld a roof that seemed slightly under a mile high. There was a throne. A bearded man sat there, on his head the Uraeus crown of Aegyptus.

Cheops, the Pharaoh, plucked a flea from his whiskers, examined it intently, finally disposed of the unhappy creature in no uncertain manner. Then he looked up and said, "We have little patience with blasphemers. This Theth-Aton must die."

Pete discovered that the room was filled with a multitude of people, both male and female, wearing garments he

could not help considering slightly indecent. There was a time and place for all things, including strip-teases. Pete blushed and dropped his pike.

"Brainless offspring of a crocodile," said a gigantic Nubian standing near by. "You're a fine soldier!"

"Soldier?" Pete gulped, realizing he was speaking Egyptian.

"One of the Pharaoh's own guard," said the Nubian. "Now pick up your pike and keep quiet or I'll impale you myself."

Pete recovered his weapon and took his place in the line of stolid guardsmen who lined the frescoed walls. He stared at Cheops and at the chained malefactor who stood before the dais, held by two brawny Egyptians.

The malefactor was lean and scrawny as an eel, and a dirty white beard drooped disconsolately over his bare chest. He was tastefully clad in a loincloth and a golden earring.

"Blaspheming the gods is a dangerous thing," Pharaoh remarked.

"He made false prophecies," somebody put in. "He said there were no gods."

"That's bad," Pete said to himself. "A man ought to learn to keep his mouth shut."

"Well, throw him in a dungeon," Cheops decided. "He shall die at the full of the moon. In some interesting and unusually painful manner."

Then Pete got a shock. The malefactor, Theth-Aton, began to bawl, "You can't do this to me! I'm not an Egyptian! It's a frame-up!" Theth-Aton was talking English!

"Professor Aker!" Pete cried, forgetting his caution. "Hey, Prof! Is that you?"

Aker recognized the phraseology if not the voice of his former companion in Rome. He whirled. "*Pete!* Pete Manx!"

"Oh, for Set's sake," Cheops growled. "What in the name of the sacred ibis is this? Bring that man forward."

Pete was escorted firmly toward the dais. The Pharaoh scrutinized him carefully. "Who are you?"

"Uh—Puto-Manes is the name," Pete improvised. It didn't sound very Egyptian but was the best he could do at short notice.

"Do you know this criminal?"

"Sure. He's an old buddy of mine."

Cheops rubbed his nose. "Indeed."

"Yeah. He ain't an Egyptian. He's an American citizen. You see—" Forthwith Pete rashly launched forth into an explanation of Dr. Mayhem's experiment. When he had finished there was a dead silence.

"Mad as a camel," Cheops remarked at last. "We'll see how a little hard work affects you. By rights you should be skinned alive for not falling on your face before the throne. But in view of your evident madness we shall be merciful. Set him to work on the Pyramid. The audience was ended."

Pete was dragged away, protesting. Professor Aker was also led off, presumably to a dungeon. Cheops continued investigating the fauna in his beard.

PETE MANX sweated and toiled in the hot African sun. One of a group of two hundred, he was pulling a gigantic block of stone over greased rollers. He panted and puffed wearily with one eye alert for an overseer.

"Manx on a chain gang," he groaned. "I'll never live it down. Cripes!"

"Put your back into it, Puto-Manes, thou lazy relative of a decayed hippopotamus," said an overseer, flicking a lash painfully on Pete's back.

A tall sour-faced slave beside Pete whose name it seemed was Aha, whispered, "Keep your face down when you talk. You're new here, aren't you?"

"I've been yanking at that pebble for ninety-seven years," Pete said bitterly.

"What were you before? A Puoni? One of the Red Sea races?"

"A shavetail," Pete said, remembering the Nubian's words in the Pharaoh's throne-room. "And a sucker."

"Your words are strange," Aha murmured. "But I was a priest of Ra."

"Ra?"

"Ra."

"You sound like a college punk at a football game," Pete observed. Aha, not understanding, merely smiled in a friendly fashion. The conversation continued. Pete learned finally that Ra was the chief god of Egypt, that Aha had been fired from his job for taking bribes too openly, that the hierarchy of priests didn't like Cheops.

Pete had an idea. "And you're a priest?"

"I was."

"I mean you still got the ear of the main guy? The—well, high priest?"

"If necessary. But he can't and won't help me."

"Well," Pete said, "maybe you can. There's a lot of slaves working on this pyramid, ain't there?"

"Thousands. They are like the sands of the Sahara in number."

"Swell! Now listen—here's my idea . . ."

Some time later they brought Pete Manx before Cheops again. Pete was distressed and angry. "Hey, what's the idea of this!" he demanded, rattling his chains. "You said you wanted to talk to me."

"We do," Cheops smiled, "and we will. After that you will die very painfully. Because of you all our slaves are squatting on the Pyramid and refusing to work."

"It's a sit-down strike," Pete explained. "We want fair hours, better food and pay."

"What you'll get," said Pharaoh, "is skinning. After that we cut off your eyelids, smear you with honey, and leave you pegged out on an anthill. You slaves are getting above yourselves. You seem to forget that I am a god."

"Okay," Peter said stubbornly. "You're a god. And I'm boss of the Pyramid Union. I'll compromise if you will."

"Take him away and skin him," Cheops ordered. "Then shoot arrows at the slaves till they resume work."

Soldiers seized Pete. His heart sank. Thinking faster than he had ever done before, he wrenched free and cried:

"Hey! Hold on a minute! Gimme a chance. I wasn't trying to stir up trouble. I was just trying to get a word with you and this was the only way I could do it."

Cheops fingered his beard. "Say your word then and begone."

Pete stood silent. His tongue felt rusty. There seemed nothing at all to say. In this crucial moment his wits deserted him. How could he possibly induce Pharaoh to change his mind?

IT JUST couldn't be done. And that meant—the anthill. An unpleasant death. Pete felt very sorry for himself. He was too young to die, he thought. Sadly he remembered his concession at Funland, his years spent barking and shilling, the new derby he had bought recently and not yet worn, the concession at the New York Fair that he could never start now . . .

Lightning struck. Pete's jaw dropped. Into his mind a blinding flash of inspiration had penetrated.

"Well?" Cheops asked impatiently.

"I got a proposition to make you," Pete burst out. "Why let the contractors gyp you out of your eye teeth and waste time building a pyramid just for the looks of the thing? What good is it?"

"It is to be our tomb," Pharaoh said. "Skin him."

"Hey, hold on! Why wait till you're dead to be glorified? Why not use the Pyramid as the base for a—a World's Fair in honor of yourself? The biggest celebration that ever hit Egypt or anywhere else. People will come from all over and the gate'll be tremendous. Build an Aquacade in the Nile—put a Perisphere beside the Pyramid — feature a Little Egypt—a Dude Ranch—all in honor of Cheops!"

"Take him . . ." Pharaoh began, then

paused. His dark eyes snapped and sparkled. Thoughtfully he fingered his beard. "Tell us more of this," Cheops said.

When a Pharaoh did anything he did it in a big way. And Cheops, having fallen hook, line and sinker for Pete's scheme, provided the barker with all the resources of Egypt.

It didn't matter that from the Middle Kingdom to the Delta the land was groaning beneath burdensome taxes. Cheops simply slapped on a few more and at Pete's suggestion introduced a sales tax. Grain and wheat took a sharp rise. Property values increased. Shipmasters grinned in their beards and spoke of prosperity being just around the Delta.

"Advertising does it," Pete told Cheops. "You gotta let the world know about this."

Pharaoh gave orders. His armies in foreign lands were provided with huge sheets of papyrus, which they plastered through foreign kingdoms. Messengers and couriers raced about the Mediterranean, bearing tidings of Egypt's fair. Cheops proclaimed a year's amnesty. During that year all men might come in peace and view the wonder of the age, the World's Fair.

"What a gate!" Pete chuckled, looking into the future. "You'll clean up. I mean—your treasury will groan beneath golden burdens."

"It had better," Cheops said, "or we'll skin you regardless. Anyway, it isn't the money so much as the fame. All will realize we are the greatest king since history's dawn."

Pete got the proscribed priest Aha paroled and enlisted his aid. He also tried to pull political wires in favor of the unhappy Professor Aker but there Pharaoh was adamant.

"Our word, once given, is law," he declared. "Theth-Aton must die as we ordained. We advise you not to speak of it again."

For awhile Peter suffered the monarch's displeasure but by dint of inventing a simple insecticide and applying it to Cheops' beard he was able to bask once again in the latter's favor.

"The lousy old goat," Pete growled to Aha in private. "I'd like to have him on the Bowery for ten minutes. He wouldn't last long in Hell's Kitchen."

"You blaspheme," Aha said reprovingly though not without a sour smile. "However it is true that the priests don't like the airs Cheops gives himself. Being a god is all right but it can be carried too far."

Pete snorted. "I'm building a whole World's Fair for him and what's my rake-off? He lets me live. And if I fall down on the job I'll be skinned alive. What kind of a deal is that?"

Aha considered. "Puto-Manes, I may be able to help you. The priests are powerful here. If you wish to speak with this Theth-Aton I can perhaps arrange it."

AS A RESULT of this conversation Pete was conducted the next night into an underground passageway, through a labyrinth of secret tunnels and into the dungeon where Theth-Aton was imprisoned. Aha, bearing a torch, stood guard. Pete hastily deposited some food and drink he had brought and roused the sleeping captive.

Professor Aker was in bad shape. He looked like a skeleton. But he sat up quickly, rattling his chains, and stared at Pete. "Manx! Thank God you've come. Get me out—it's been hell here."

Pete was oddly touched. "Can't do it," he said shortly. "Your chains are riveted on, Prof. Here's a file though. It'll take time but keep working."

Aker groaned. Pete sat down in the filthy straw and told him everything that had happened. "So that's that," he finished. "I'm okay for awhile but I can't get you out of stir. Unless you can help."

"Me—help?" Aker asked bitterly. "How?"

"Cripes, you're a scientist." Pete pro-

tested. "You ought to be able to dope out something. I can get you anything you want almost."

"I haven't the materials," Aker said desperately. "I can't make a gun. I can't even make a battery. There's no zinc—not in this barbarous age."

"Can you make poison gas?" Pete suggested.

"Without electricity? It can't be done."

"If you only had electricity . . ." Pete pondered. He looked up as Aha called softly. "Okay, Aha. What a name!" he confided to Aker. "But he's a right guy. Now you just sit tight and use that file. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Bring some more food," the Professor said sadly.

"Sure," Pete nodded and peered closely at the prisoner's beard. "I'll bring some insect-powder, too."

Scratching himself in a distrait manner he hurried out.

Not for nothing had Pete studied closely the blurbs on the New York Fair. He knew the exhibits and attractions by heart. And he set to work to bring them to life in Egypt.

Not all were practical. Some were impossible for one reason or another. Gardens on Parade fell flat. Cheops spoke scornfully of flowers. Pete suggested bull-fights instead. Toreadors went into training.

The House of Jewels was another lemon. Pharaoh did not look with favor upon the idea of exhibiting his treasures to the common herd. Moreover, some of the jewels were sacred. The priests had their own treasure but they said they weren't interested if the king wasn't. It was the amusement center that roused Pete to heights of genius.

After setting the engineers to work on the Perisphere, that would rise beside the Pyramid-Trylon and be equipped with a scenic railway track, he returned to the Nile, had the crocodile and hippopotami cleared out and went to work. There were casualties, of course. The crocodiles saw no reason for leaving their homes. They stuck around and ate the slaves. This distressed Pete so much he took to riding a camel about the fair grounds.

It was impossible to create an Aquacade in the river itself. The supply of swimmers wouldn't have held out for one thing. Pete had a vast swimming-pool excavated, filled through a canal leading to the Nile and stationed guards to keep out crocodiles.

The performers practised day and night under the supervision of Aha, who showed unexpected agility in the water. But presently a herd of hippopotami discovered the pool and it took weeks to drive them out.

Pete re-invented musical instruments. He successfully constructed drums, cymbals, harps and flutes, even metamorphosed a trumpet into a cornet. But to his disgust found himself unable to develop a saxophone. This was perhaps just as well.

Several orchestras came into being. Surprising talent was unearthed. One youth showed signs of developing into a semi-prehistoric Benny Goodman and his swingy cacophony started a jitterbug craze that nearly got Pete into trouble with the authorities. Such goings-on were either witchcraft or madness, it was contended, and Egypt would be a laughing-stock.

Pete built a Parachute Jump, using an obelisk for an axis, which was a tremendous success. He tried a Dude Ranch, which closed for lack of business. The Seminole Village, where brawny Egyptians wrestled with crocodiles, attracted children only for awhile. Later word got round that occasionally the moppets were falling in and being devoured by the crocs and after that Pete had to hang out S. R. O. signs.

He made a Stratoship, which killed a surprising number of people until Pete took the precaution of strapping them in. And he planned a Sun Valley of snow sports, which drew vast crowds. There wasn't any snow, of course, but polished marble ramps took its place,

and toboggans, sleds and ski-jumpers were risking their necks on it.

But Pete's greatest triumph was in the culinary line. He introduced the hot-dog and the hamburger. Both proved extraordinarily popular. Due to a misconception a great number of canines were slaughtered at first.

MEANWHILE Pete was racking his brains for some way to save Professor Aker. The unhappy scientist's demise was scheduled for the formal opening of the Fair, when a large number of criminals would be killed. It was only by accident that Pete happened to remember something he had read about the Zoological Wonders show and its marine marvels at the New York Fair. He was immediately inspired to activity.

With the aid of Aha he sent forth men on secret errands. When they had returned successful he went down to Aker's dungeon and interviewed the professor again. "It might work," Aker said doubtfully after Pete had explained. "After all it works at the New York Fair."

"It's *got* to work," Pete snapped. "Lord knows when Mayhem will get his machine fixed. And if my plan don't go you're sunk. I can't do it alone anyway. I'm no scientist. You tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"The priests approved," said Aha, who was also present. "If it succeeds they will support you both and reinstate me. They will help insofar as possible."

"And we got to hurry," Pete said. "We only got a week."

"Well," Aker pondered, "let's take the throne first."

The fair opened with a bang. Incredible throngs came, saw and were conquered, amazed and delighted. They wrecked their nervous systems on Pete's hellish amusement devices and did shocking things to their stomachs with his weird foods.

They skied and tobogganed and fell off sleds, got friction-burns on the slides, roller coasted through the Perisphere, gaped at the Aquacade, shagged and trucked and swung to music both sweet and hot, finally clustered in the huge throne room for the big event—the slaughter of the malefactors.

Despite the size of the great chamber only a portion of the multitudes could crowd in. Pete was among these. So were Aha and a sly-looking old fellow who was the high priest of the Sun-god Ra.

"All set?" Pete whispered to Aha.

The other nodded. Here and there about the room priests were distributed and Aha made a covert signal to them. And now a hidden orchestra played *Ra Save the Pharaoh* and Cheops appeared and took his place on the throne.

The prisoners were dragged in, full fifty of them, scrawny miserable wretches who looked ready to welcome death as a relief. Among them was Professor Aker. Pete waved at him.

"Now for the slaughter," Cheops said with all evidence of satisfaction. "We'll start, methinks, with a little dismemberment."

A leather-aproned half-clad giant approached and dragged one of the shrinking prisoners erect. By some awful chance it was Professor Aker. The man of science yelled mightily for aid. The giant gagged Aker by the simple expedient of stuffing the prisoner's beard into his mouth.

Pete whistled softly. The high priest took his cue, strode forward, held up a warning hand.

"Hold!" His great voice bellowed out, filling the throne room. *"Hold,* Pharaoh! In the name of Ra!"

Cheops' small eyes blinked warily. "Well?"

"I bear a message from the Sun-god. He sayeth this—'Free the prisoners.'"

The Pharaoh remained motionless for a dozen heartbeats. "It is not the wont of great Ra to speak in matters temporal," he said finally.

"I, high priest of Ra, bear his word. Even Pharaoh must obey."

"Is it so?" Cheops asked with deadly softness. "Now we think you are lying. There are prophecies and prophecies. Some are true. Some are not. Why has not Ra spoken of this before?"

"Do you question the voice of the god?"

FOR ANSWER Cheops nodded to his guard. The brawny giant took a firm grip on his sword and hoisted Professor Aker erect.

"I call on Ra!" the high priest shouted. "Judge between the Pharaoh and your servant."

Simultaneously a man behind the throne moved swiftly. A leathern cord whipped about Cheops' waist and bound him tightly to the ornate chair. Over the room a hushed stillness fell.

"What blasphemy is this?" Cheops snarled. So swift had been his captor's movement that few had seen Pharaoh fettered. But the leathern thong was pitifully weak—for a keen knife gleamed now in Cheops' hand.

"I call on Ra!" the high priest roared again. And simultaneously the Pharaoh screamed and his knife fell clattering to the stones.

Cheops' body arched and strained convulsively. His hands tightened on the arm-rests of the throne. His face was a mask of agony.

"Judge!" the priest shouted, his eyes upturned.

Pharaoh fell back, sweating and choking. In the paralyzed silence his voice fell with icy clarity. *"Slay us this priest!"* he thundered.

His last word was lost in a hoarse scream. Once more his body arched against the restraining strap. He wriggled and squirmed like a hooked fish. And he yelled bloody murder.

But the imperial guard was roused now. They rushed forward in a body, pikes raised. Pete's dulcet voice spoke. "Give 'em hell, boys!" Mr. Manx roared.

The priests scattered about the room went into action. They whipped out curiously-shaped contrivances and fitted them over their mouths and nostrils. From small bags they withdrew glittering spheres and smashed them on the floor. Instantly a choking acrid odor filled the chamber.

Pete too had donned a mask. He snatched a pike from a spitting gasping guardsman and smashed the man over the head with it. Aha too was busy but as he had forgotten his mask he didn't last very long. In the midst of the melee the high priest stood unmoved, his dignity somewhat marred by his gas mask.

Cheops was still screaming shrilly. Pete's smile was maliciously appreciative as he glanced at the throne.

The battle did not last long. The soldiers were speedily rendered unconscious. Great fans cleared the atmosphere. And the multitude paused in their flight and waited, ready to depart again at the first sign of hostility.

"Extinguish all lights," the high priest bade. This was done. In utter darkness the great voice went rolling on. "Ra, Lord of Egypt, Thou whose dwelling is the life-giving Sun, judge now between Pharaoh and thy servant."

Simultaneously blinding dazzling light blazed through the room. It came from a globe suspended near the ceiling. It was too bright to look upon and with a stifled cry practically everybody in the room fell on their faces.

A roaring, distant voice thundered, "Pharaoh must obey my priest!"

The high priest turned to Cheops, who lay lax in his throne. "Will you obey your god?"

Cheops strove to speak. Pete, standing behind the throne, pressed a lever and involuntarily the Pharaoh yelped.

"Yes!" he cried hastily. "We shall obey."

"Will you free these prisoners and bow to the rule of Ra's priests?"

"We—Yes!"

"Swear it by Ra!"

There was utter silence. Cheops gritted his teeth. He drew a deep breath, and then met Pete's eye.

Pharaoh deflated visibly. "Yes," he muttered. "We swear it—by Ra!"

Bang!

PETE MANX opened his eyes and looked at Dr. Mayhem. He was back in the laboratory. Ancient Egypt, Cheops, high priest and Aha— all were gone. Pete clutched his aching head, rose unsteadily and demanded a drink.

It helped. He steadied himself in his chair and regarded Mayhem closely. The doctor had a black eye.

"Where'd you get the mouse?" Pete demanded. Then, as a thought recurred to him. "Where's the prof? Is he back?"

Mayhem gingerly touched his eye. "Er—yes. Professor Aker arrived back half an hour ago. I started my machine as soon as I'd finished my repairs. What happened?"

"Didn't the prof tell you?"

"No," said Mayhem, again fingering his discolored eye. "He was—ah—somewhat unreasonable. I fear he lost his temper."

"For two cents," said Pete, "I'd lose mine. First, do I get that five grand you promised me?"

"Of course. My check. Here."

Pete sighed. "Well, I can keep my temper for five thousand fish. And as for what happened—"

He explained. Mayhem listened, open-mouthed. Finally the doctor burst out with questions. "Bombs? Gas bombs? What—how—"

"Tear gas—ammonia. The prof told me how."

"But you can't make ammonia gas without electricity."

"We had it," Pete grinned. "That's how we lit up the big bulb in the ceiling. And we had Pharaoh's throne wired up, too. A regular hot squat—electric chair to you, Doc."

"But how? There were no facilities in Egypt for the development of current, were there? You couldn't have used static electricity."

"Doc," Pete said, rising, "I am going to use this five grand to start a concession at the New York Fair. Drop in sometime. I'll show you around the dump. There's one show called Zoo—Zoological Wonders you hadn't ought to miss."

Mayhem stared. "What do you mean?"

"They got some swell stuff there—pandas and things. And," said Pete, starting for the door, "they also got an electric eel that gives off enough current to play a radio and run a toy train. If one eel can do that, Doc, two dozen of 'em can do—*pu-lenty!* I had those eels wired for business!"

Ted Nelson visits the microcosmic realms and finds an atomic romance! Read—IN TWO WORLDS, by Edward E. Chappelow, one of the many unusual science fiction tales coming in the next issue of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE!

This was real, no fever of his mind

DREAM'S END

By A. CONNELL

If the world be but a dream, what of when—the dreamer wakes?

WHEN David Lane finished his daily work in the giant Carmen wheatfields, there was husk-dust in his hair and grease on his hands. He was tired and depressed.

Bella was changing.

In just what way she was changing he could not think. But there was an oddness about her at times that alternately amazed and frightened him.

Why, he wondered, had she lost her power of speech last night? Why had she glided suddenly from his side with an impossibly levitated grace as though in the grip of some fathomless inconstancy? Why had the bewildering impression come to him—that in the dark her eyes were beginning to assume the glow of feline phosphorescence?

His path took him past Bella's house. He stopped and called to her, "Bella! Bella!"

She opened a window and looked out at him. "Yes?"

"Bella, do you want to walk in the park tonight?"

"Why not? We always do." She seemed puzzled.

Lane went on down the road. Bella had been normal, he reflected. Did her apparent strangeness exist then only in his own imagination? He did not drink. Drugs were unknown to him. He could not reason why he felt the touch of some

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vast insanity incalculably far beyond mortal conception.

For the walk in the park Bella had clothed her narrow body in a long white gown that gave her a swanlike aspect. She seemed to glide rather than to walk and Lane had trouble in keeping pace with her. "You're walking fast," he protested as they neared the Angels' Gateway. "Why?"

"Am I?" she said. "I hadn't noticed. I'm sorry."

But she did not change her pace.

"How was the work today?" she asked.

"The same," he said, brightening at the everyday nature of her query. "We're reaping the southern field. We'll be able to finish the western by Tuesday if the rain keeps off. The other sections are nearly done too."

"That's good," she said. "I like to hear that."

He supposed that that was natural, for the Carmen wheat areas were owned by Scott, her cousin, who had financed her college education and the small tutoring establishment she had set up.

They reached the bench at the Angels' Gateway where they usually rested. But Bella would have passed it by if Lane had not caught her arm.

AS they crossed the grass to the seat Lane glanced down and a mind-shattering realization came to him—in fully fifty percent of her strides Bella's exquisitely clad feet did not so much as touch the ground!

He sat beside her, a sweat of horror on his brow. She looked at him and indicated no astonishment at his fear. Before God, what was she?

He began to think of her as something unholy for he could have sworn that there had been no mistake—she had as much floated as walked through the park. And here she sat at his side, no longer the girl he loved but a monstrosity who could defy normal laws with the magic of her unholy necromancy! What was she?

She leaned back in the seat and spread her arms.

"It's a lovely night," she said, admiring the dark interlacing weave of foliage over her head. "So still, so quiet—"

He fought against his old love for her and lost. He caught her in his arms and kissed her. She responded automatically.

She was real!

It was he then who was not normal. His own insanity was ascribing to her fantastic abilities. But could a madman comprehend his own madness? Doubts assailed him; he could not think what was right and what was wrong.

Bella stood erect. He looked at her and again the sweat started to his brow.

Before his eyes her body was waxing exotically beautiful—was writhing, twisting, undulating, throbbing—was elevating itself through consecutive moulds of splendor toward some unguessable zenith!

"Heaven help me!" Lane prayed aloud. For this was real! This was no fever of mind, no imagery of night!

From Bella's lips issued murmurings and moanings, hints of song, grating whispers, querulous mutterings. Coincidentally she began to voice a thousand scale notes and to speak in a hundred tongues—yet Lane heard all of this at one and the same time.

He sprang to her side and fastened his arms about her as though his strength might restore her. She seemed to shiver in his grasp—to grow impalpable and dim like some extra-dimensional unsubstantiality—and horror mounted in him. *"Bella!"* he screamed. "What are you?"

Her eyes glowed purple and gold and other more alien hues and on and on went the vile soaring mutations that carried her ever upward and farther from Lane's understanding. She was like a shell in his grasp—a shell filled with struggling abnormal entities, each striving frantically to look through her eyes, to speak through her mouth and mould her body to the apexes of their own bizarre desires.

Then there was a moment of quiet and she spoke in her own voice. "What am I? What am I? I don't know. David —*hold* me!"

She shivered, blurred to the consistency of a wraith. She vanished from his hands like a shred of mist in the sun—fading miraculously as a shadow before an onmarching dusk.

Lane stood trembling. He was alone. Athwart the stars he thought he could perceive a ghostlike vision of Bella, immeasurably expanded. It hovered there, mocking the ruin of his life, then receded with instantaneous velocity into galactic distance.

The moon swayed in the sky. Bands of color stole across its surface and began to glow and alternate.

Yet, incredibly, the moonlight in the park remained flat and white.

The trees whipped suddenly to the thrust of an undetectable wind. The ground shivered and lifted. Grass sprouted in fevered bursts. The very cosmos seemed poised on the brink of an impossible catastrophe.

Then with an abruptness that was unreal all was normal again and Lane walked away, groping through the dusk of the night and the twilight of his own mind.

MASSEY DUNE, controller of the giant Westmore Observatory and its new 200-inch mirror, flung himself from his wire-straddled chair, swore fierce oaths, and thrust his first assistant into the place he had vacated.

"Do you see what I see?" he shouted. "Do you see it? Do you see Forty-two Aries moving?"

The assistant spun a wheel, then turned a white face on Dune.

"I saw it. Yes—moving. I couldn't keep pace with it."

Dune roared curses and fled up to the roof. He stood at the low parapet and flung a finger through the icy night air.

"*Look!* Forty-two Aries! It *moves!*"

The sparkling point of the remote triple star, to all purposes rendered motionless by the colossal distances separating it from Earth, now drove down the sky like a skyrocket and vanished below the horizon.

"Madness!" Dune shouted. "Impossible! *Madness!* For us to see a movement in Forty-two Aries the star must travel unaccountable billions of times the velocity of light! Look, it's gone."

A coldness crept down to his heart. His first assistant had followed him to the roof—had stood at his side—and now the man had disappeared like the hellish vapor of a phantom!

The landscape rocked. Portions of it and portions of the building on which Dune stood faded to obscurity. Stars that were familiar to him as the fingers of his own hands were obliterated from the constellations. Others sprang across the heavens with unnatural velocities, pursuing each other in demoniacal races to the last fringes of the horizon.

"I am mad," Dune said. "Insane."

A host of fluttering birds flew about his head, and he could not think whence they had come. . . .

The Atlantic giant, Queen Elizabeth, was one day at sea with a heavy passenger list, when a report reached its commander that the ship was losing buoyancy. No diagrammed measurements were needed. By looking over a rail the commander could see with his own eyes the calm sea creeping up the Queen's mammoth sides toward the first open deck. He hesitated, puzzled, on the verge of a drastic order.

And in that instant, as though the liner had gained inestimable weight or age-old laws had been disrupted, the Queen Elizabeth slipped down through the ocean into the Atlantic's awful chasms—so swiftly that no wireless message could go out from her, no single scream break from the throats of its drowned thousands. . . .

Mizala Ecava, the soprano with range and technique indescribably superb, advanced onto the platform on the night of her third New York concert. She stood for a moment, delighted

by the size of her audience, then signaled her accompanist for the opening notes of *Wind Trill,* an aria far beyond the powers of any other singer.

She opened her red mouth and began to sing. A shock of awe ran across the faces of the audience, travelling from the de luxe lounges to the hazy reaches of the gallery. The voice of Ecava was a hoarse, vile croaking!

There she stood, gowned in white, booming like a human frog! More ghastly—it was evident that she was entirely unconscious of the horror of her transformed voice. She boomed and croaked on, throwing her arms in absurd gestures and smiling indulgently at her listeners. She stopped. The blood drained from her cheeks.

Her audience had seemed to waver—had collapsed into a maelstrom. Then it was gone, just as a splotch of dust might go in the passing of a swift wind!

A band of mad formless light fell through a vanished ceiling, lashing itself from wall to wall in a titanic chromatic tempest. It stormed, drew back in mindless eddies and with it into a nameless limbo went Mizala Ecava and her incomparable voice. . . .

Mary Tallon had planted some poppy seed in her little garden. She watered them and covered them carefully. Then she turned to ponder the disposition of some new ferns the florist had sent her.

She heard no faintest sound and her back was to the poppy bed for not more than thirty seconds, yet when she turned, she saw four crimson flowers sprouting from her garden. She stared at them with no understanding.

For from the undisturbed earth to the tips of their scarlet petals they towered higher than a skyscraper!

HERBERT DEXTER was small and quiet, and he lived inconspicuously, but his brain was attuned to heights unreached by many men better known than he, for he had a priceless gift of imagination denied to most of the foremost scientists of the world.

Dexter had watched the newspapers closely in the last few days, noting the almost numberless disappearances of men and women recounted there and poring over the records of the bizarre events that clutched the world.

Phenomena had come to him personally as well and it was only when he had learned to appreciate the utterly fantastic nature of the majority of them that he had begun to build the hundred pieces into the catastrophic solution of a vaguely comprehensible whole. He sat in his study and began to write in a note-book. He wrote:

Today is the sixteenth of April. The truth comes gradually to me, and it is almost too much for me mentally to shape, let alone write here. Last night, with the naked eye, I watched three constellations recede into infinity.

A star which I have identified as Alpha Centauri acted in a fashion that makes me deduce that it drove in out of interstellar space, passed through our Solar System and fled on, its double suns leaving no detectable heat or light in their passing.

There have been too many disappearances in the daily papers for me to attempt to record here and there have been even stranger things that are only barely hinted at. I am a little afraid lest I too should be snatched away.

* * * * *

Today is the seventeenth. I am right. Heaven help me but I am right.

The sun has vanished and in its place there is a cluster of colored spheres that alternately hang in suspension and flee in night-destroying races across the sky. They shed changing light but little heat and are subject to no knowable laws.

"How long before the end, I wonder. How long?

* * * * *

The eighteenth. The swiftness of change almost eludes me. Sometimes I feel the very pen in my hand grows unsubstantial and the paper of my book

flows like water, indeterminate as to whether it shall assume the consistency of vapor, liquid or solid.

The sun has returned—but it dawned in a smothering host of nameless colors and it has a heat that bites through insulated walls and sears the body with a force uninked to ordinary heat.

I am afraid, so pitifully afraid.

I shall try to write down what I have deduced but it will be difficult..

There is, or was, a scientist—my mind waxes foggy and I cannot recall his name—and it was from words of his that I gathered my inspiration.

He said in essence that our Cosmos might be but a dream in the mind of a sleeping Entity—an Entity that exists where It is and conjures in Its drowsing brain the phantom images of our galaxies, of our planet, of ourselves.

It can be said that this cannot be—that we have wills of our own—that we are not imagined puppets. But I think—"Can I be rich tomorrow if I am poor today? Can I walk through a solid wall, stride through the upper air, multiply myself as I choose? How far does this free will of mine really extend?"

And I know then that we are all bound in little grooves. Each action we make is but a preconceived idea in the million-channeled intelligence of an incomprehensible Entity.

It has grown dark now, even though it was but recently dawn, and my electric system does not function. A candle burns purple as I write this and I cannot tell when it may choose to obey other laws, or expanding to crushing size or vanishing utterly. I feel heat and cold coincidentally and the sensation is beyond description.

* * * * *

The nineteenth. The end must be very close. How long now? How long?

The Entity is stirring to wakefulness and this, our universe, which is the dream in Its sleeping brain, is disintegrating and its form runs into riotous shapelessness before the onslaught of the Entity's waking lucidity.

Disintegration, obliteration—yet who can deny it? Has it not been a scientific concept that all that we considered to be matter is reducible to electron and proton, which are but electricity, and which in turn is nothing? We are nothing! We are a dream!

What a brain must be the brain of this Entity that it can govern a dream of so vast and intricate a universe.

The sky is alight with flickering fires and I see only by red light, so that the bizarre landscape that confronts me through the window is bathed in a blood flame. Emotions battle in me and sensations roar through my body with a force never before experienced. I cannot rise or sit down or turn my head—but I am aware that the walls of my little house are long gone and that the desk is impalpable beneath my elbows. Yet I do not fall, for forces such as gravity have ceased to claim existence in the Dream. . . .

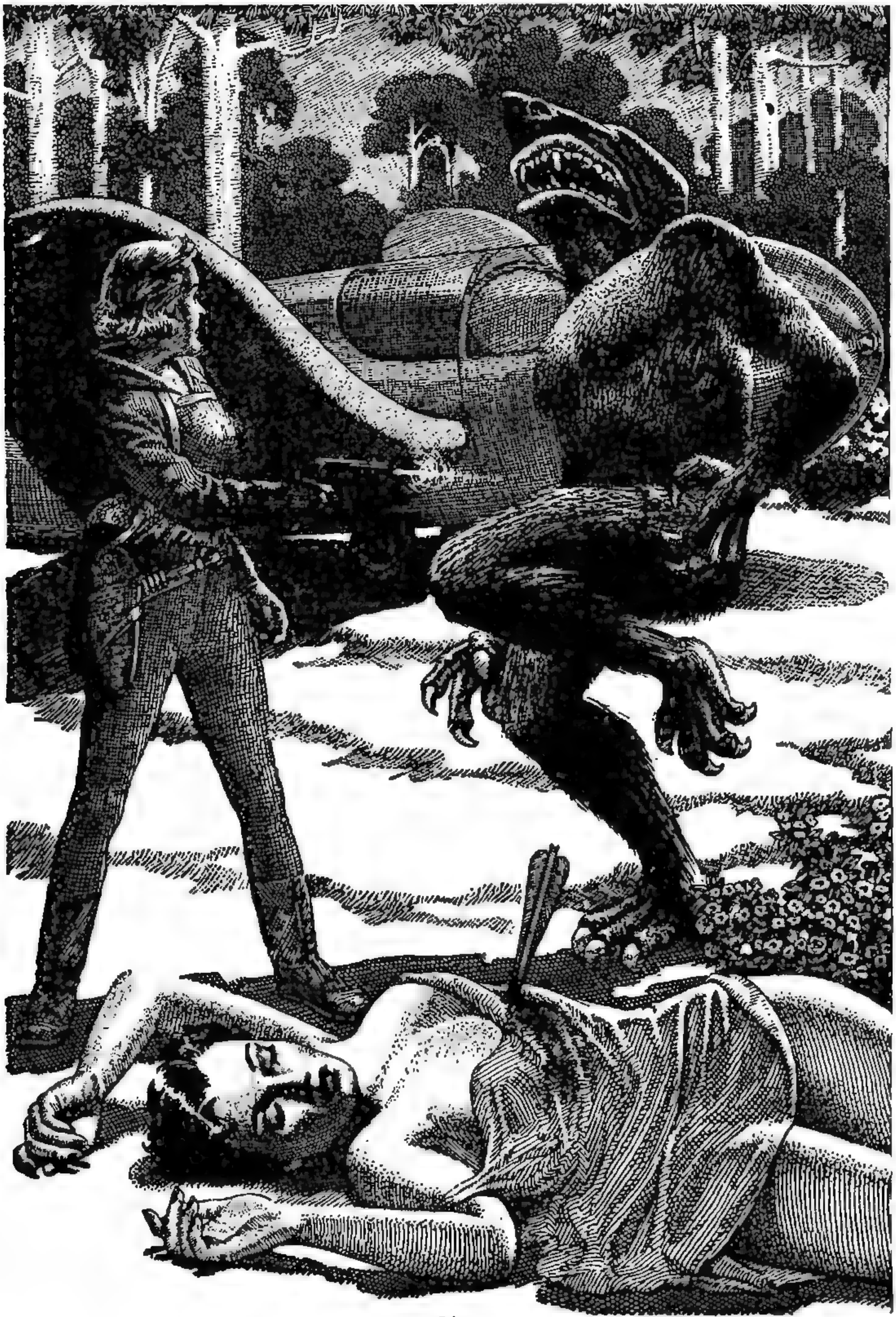
Later. It is near now, so very near. I see things impossible and I look from one end of the galaxy to the other and even beyond and all is chaos.

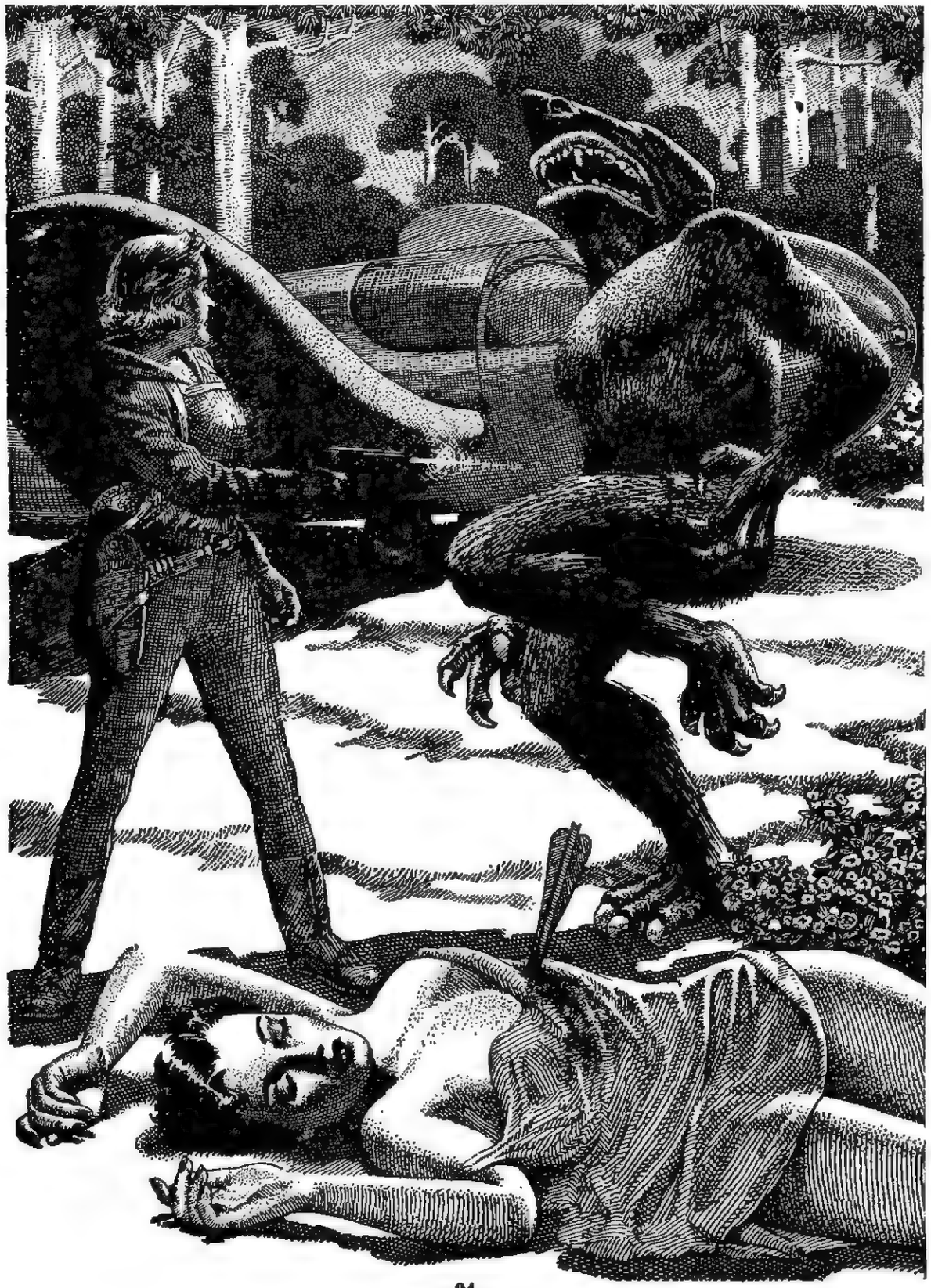
I see monstrosities feathered with fire stride across my red landscape and they bow and sway to the thunder of gigantic symphonies of sound. They do not recognize me and pass on.

I see oceans flood across me and in them triumphant things disport without reason in liquid paradises and I am conscious that I no longer breathe. I see my world transmuted into an empire of crystal that glitters like ruby in the red light and whose million outcroppings flower hellishly sentient with the waxing and waning of the crimson that feeds their evil.

I see limitless forests, the march of galactic hordes of shapes too bewildering to trace. I feel heartbreak and joy, fury and greed and other emotions that I have neither will nor desire to control.

So near now—so near. Farewell to life—farewell forever. For us at least it was real and true. . . .





Via the Hewitt Ray

A scientist's daughter follows her father into a complex world where men are playthings and women rule the roost!

a novelet by

M. F. RUPERT

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CHAPTER I

Messages from Beyond

LETTER to Lucile Hewitt from her father, John J. Hewitt:

My Dear Daughter: It is now eleven o'clock and I have one hour in which to give you my farewell message. Do not be alarmed, Lucile. I am not contemplating suicide. But as a climax to my lifelong studies I am now going to put to the final test my latest discoveries. Should I be successful in this experiment you will not see me for a long time. When you find that I am missing do not fear for me but rejoice that I have succeeded in the great undertaking.

You have now finished college and are engrossed in your own work so, although I shall miss you and do not doubt you will miss me, I feel free to make this experiment. Financially you do not need me as you are now a self-supporting young woman and I have left provision wherein you will receive this house and all that I own after a

I drew and fired pointblank at the creature's leg

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year. The greatest hardship is severing, for the time being, our dear comradeship—but I know you will join with me in making this sacrifice.

Do you remember, dear, that about a year ago I told you of the experiments I was making in light waves? It is about those experiments and what they led up to that I wish to write. I will try not to be too technical.

In the laboratory you will find my equipment, electrical apparatus and light-wave machine, also the Hewitt Ray machine. In the top right-hand drawer of my desk is a manuscript explaining fully the new discoveries I have made. Please do not allow anything to be disturbed in the laboratory while I am gone.

If I do not return within a year you may publish the manuscript. I hope to be back before the year is up and attend to it myself, but if I do not return then you, my beloved daughter, may present to the world my life's work.

No doubt, you remember when I erected the light-wave machine. I told you then that it was similar to a radio receiving set but, instead of receiving radio waves, it was intended to receive light waves. Just as sound is transmitted from a source through the air by a series of waves, so light is transmitted through space by a series of ether waves.

This machine receives the light waves just as radio receives the radio waves. Of course the real explanation is much more complicated and only a physicist could really understand and appreciate the beauty and immensity of the idea. But as I am writing simply for your benefit the explanation I gave you a year ago is sufficient.

WHEN I built the machine I had no idea of the astounding revelations I was to receive. But one day, while twirling the dial, I noticed a peculiar arrangement of spectral lines showing on the screen.

Do you remember enough of your physics to understand what this means? When the spectrum is studied minutely with a spectroscope it is found not to be a continuous band of colors but to be crossed by many dark lines, called Fraunhofer lines, which are familiar to all who know light waves. It is also well known that the difference in color in the spectrum corresponds to the difference of wave-length. Keep this explanation in mind as you read what follows.

As soon as I noticed these peculiar lines showing through the spectrum I immediately ceased twirling the dials and studied the spectral lines, the characteristics of which were totally unfamiliar. For fifteen minutes this peculiar spectrum appeared on the screen and was then displaced by the usual Fraunhofer lines.

Not touching the dials I waited carefully for a reappearance of the dark lines but not until five o'clock the next evening did they come. I compared them line for line with my drawing of the day before and they were exactly the same! For many nights at five o'clock these unusual lines appeared on the screen. Finally I dared to change the dials, to see whether, if I restored those numbers, the phenomenon would occur.

It did but only at five o'clock. With the help of Professor Hendricks, who died last month, I built a light-wave sending set and after a vast amount of research and labor we found the combination of prisms and lenses that produced the correct spectrum. By manipulating the wave lengths we produced the dark line spectrum which had at first amazed me when beholding it on my own screen.

You know that Professor Hendricks and myself have always believed in the reality of the fourth and even the fifth and sixth dimensions. Remember how you laughed at us and told us that theoretically we were correct but that actual and tangible proof was impossible? Now do not laugh, dear, when I say that Professor Hendricks and myself believed that these unusual lines

were being sent by intelligent beings but *not of our dimension!* The elements of these lines are not known to us.

Do I make myself clear? If these strange spectral lines showed on my receiving screen, they were being sent by someone. The fact that they showed night after night at the same time and only when the dials were set in a certain manner proved that it was no accidental short-circuiting of the wavelength but that they were being sent deliberately. The precise and undeviating arrangement of lines argued that a message of some kind was being sent. What the message meant and who was sending it we did not know but we intended to find out if possible.

One evening immediately after receiving what we had by now come to call 'our message' we switched on our sending set and repeated the message line for line. After a few moments there flashed back on our receiving screen the identical lines! We were highly elated, you may be sure, and figured that whoever was sending that message had received our repetition of their code and was indicating that.

HOWEVER, then came the illness and death of Professor Hendricks and I was left to carry on alone. I almost despaired of making any progress when there flashed into my mind another possible way of communicating with these strangers.

Several years ago I was working on a series of experiments in short wavelengths, especially cathode and X-rays. Just as the X-ray was discovered by experimenting with cathode rays, so one day, experimenting with the X-ray, I discovered an entirely new ray which I called the Hewitt Ray. No doubt you remember the excitement that the publication of its discovery caused.

Like the X-ray the Hewitt Ray will penetrate any substance opaque to ordinary light, but the great difference is that it does not, like the X-ray, stop at forming a shadow picture. By diminishing the gas pressure within the tube and increasing the voltage across the electrodes the penetrating power of the resulting rays is increased to such an extent that the object on which the ray is focused is disintegrated. What is stranger still, no picture of the object appears at the focal point but the actual object itself is reassembled and reappears, none the worse for its experience.

You were just a young girl then but you must remember all the talk and conjecture aroused by the discovery of this new ray. Huge Hewitt Ray machines were built with a focus of many miles and a few intrepid souls were found to lend themselves to the experiment.

But although they arrived safely at their destination and were loud in their praise of this method of traveling, the general public would have none of it. Humanity has not yet evolved to the point where it is willing to travel 186,000 miles per second. So my Hewitt Ray, conceded to be a marvelous thing, was put on the shelf like many other revolutionary inventions.

So, as I thought of this ray, I wondered if, by experimenting a little further, I could possibly change the ray so that it would not merely reassemble the object which it disintegrated but allow the object to travel on. Into what, you may ask? Space? The fourth dimension or wherever it is that a light wave goes when it has passed beyond our eye?

I will not weary you, Lucile, with the details but I have succeeded in changing the rays as I wanted to and have discovered that light waves do not die out but by an energy transformation, they pass into another plane of energy.

With my improved Hewitt Ray I have disintegrated objects such as books, vases, flowers and live animals and sent them traveling as part of the wave of light into the unknown world from which I have been receiving messages.

With the dials of my light-wave machine set to receive an answer from the beings with whom I have been in com-

munication, every time I sent something through, no matter at what time of the day or night, I received a message which I interpreted to mean that the objects were received.

I have determined to go to this new world. It will be a simple accomplishment. I have built a large Hewitt Ray projector which will be automatically shut off after I have passed through. What sort of world I will find or what kind of people or beings I will meet I do not know. I believe they are friendly and will welcome me, but anyway I will soon find out.

Now, dear daughter, I will leave you. Enclosed you will find the keys to the laboratory and detailed instructions for working the light-wave receiving and sending set. Every evening at five o'clock I will endeavor to send you a message, according to the light-wave code I have worked out. It will make me very happy if you will answer.

Goodbye, dear. That you may keep well and happy is the wish of

Your loving father,

JOHN J. HEWITT.

CHAPTER II

Lucile Hewitt's Story

TO SAY that I was astonished and alarmed to receive this letter is describing my feeling feebly. Darling old Dad, to travel along a light wave into a new world filled with unknown dangers! Why, he was forever cautioning me to be careful! Even as late as 1945 he thought airplanes were dangerous! I have often begged him to let me take him for a ride in my flyabout but he declared he did not have the necessary courage. Yet he risked life daily in his beloved laboratory.

It is really too bad that I am not scientifically inclined. What a help I might have been to Dad! But I honestly tried to fit myself for a scientific career and it was not my fault that I failed miserably.

When Dad got out his Hewitt Ray and there was talk of utilizing it for travel, then my interest in science awoke. To travel with the speed of light! Imagine the thrill! Unknown to Dad, for I knew he would forbid me, I slipped away from school and volunteered for a demonstration trip along the Hewitt Ray. I was one of the 'intrepid souls' Dad speaks of. It was glorious! To place yourself before the ray and in a flash be hundreds of miles away! That is traveling!

When the use of the Hewitt Ray was discontinued my interest in science dropped. But my one great interest in life had been revealed to me. Travel—and travel with limitless speed! The next speediest thing I could find was the airplane and you may be sure I got one.

At the time I learned to operate my first plane I was sixteen years old. As public interest in aviation grew, I grew right with it until now, at twenty-six, I have been piloting a huge commercial airliner between New York and Honolulu for five years.

The morning I had received Dad's letter I had just come off duty. I had been on a six-day shift and now I had before me three days of rest. That was the regular schedule.

After reading the letter I went immediately to the laboratory. There the large Hewitt Ray machine attracted my attention. After examining it closely, I found the controls and with a little trepidation turned them on. A soft almost-invisible amber ray shone from the funnel-shaped aperture. Emboldened a little I took off my glove and placed it experimentally on the platform immediately in the glow of the ray. At first nothing happened but then the glove began to glow with the same soft radiance of the ray and almost imperceptibly it disappeared, becoming a part of the surrounding light.

I next turned my attention to the light-wave receiver, tuning in and set-

ting the dial at twenty. At once the visascreen burst into radiance. A succession of beautiful colors floated across. I reached out and pulled a switch marked *Spectroletope* and a change took place on the screen. The beautiful colors were broken and separated, mingling and intermingling in a bewildering manner, tiny lines forming regularly through the whole. I watched it fascinated for a while and then turned off the switch.

Well, Dad was gone and here I was with a laboratory full of marvelous equipment that I only faintly understood. I read his letter over again and tried to reassure myself that he was all right. But how could I convince myself he was safe? He was a marvelous scientist but outside of his laboratory he was lost. He would always be a child to the world.

After two days of restless and troubled thoughts I determined to get someone to operate the machine and follow him through to that strange world. Acting on this decision I radiophoned my former classmate, Marion Wells, who was already successful in a scientific career.

AFTER looking up her private wavelength I tuned in and in a few seconds her serious spectacled face appeared on my television. I did not go into detail but explained that I needed desperately the aid of her scientific knowledge and asked her to come to my house.

"Be with you in ten minutes," she promised and signed off.

And in ten minutes her auto-plane landed in a vertical drop below our driveway, its wings automatically collapsing as it touched the ground. I admired her skilful driving as she came through the gate and taxied under the trees up to the front verandah.

In the laboratory Marion showed the greatest interest in the Hewitt Ray. The light-wave receiver in fact seemed to be familiar to her. Then she turned it on and watched the visascreen awhile. Curiously I asked her if she knew what the colors and lines meant.

"Yes, they are the international wave-code system," she nodded. "Slowly but surely this manner of communication is taking the place of the old-fashioned method. The light-wave stations are more simple to construct and much cheaper to operate and the regular service provided is vastly superior to the old telegraph method."

When the wonders of the laboratory had been examined and tried out we sat down and tried to figure out some way of getting Dad back safely. Marion advocated waiting for a definite message from Dad but I was too worried to consider that. I wanted Marion to stay here and intercept messages while I went through to get Dad.

"But listen to reason," Marion pleaded. "This plane of existence to which your father has gone is without a doubt as big as the world in which you are now living. Perhaps he has gone or been carried thousands of miles away. How do you expect to find him?"

"Well," I answered stubbornly, "if he is over there, perhaps he needs me and if he needs me I am going to him. I'll find him somehow."

"Very well. Tell me how you propose to get back once you find him."

I must have looked crestfallen for Marion reached over and patted my hand. "Don't worry, Lou. I have a plan. We will have to get busy, though, if you expect to go through in the near future."

Briskly she asked me for the manuscript Dad had written and from it got a detailed description of how to build and operate the new Hewitt Ray machine.

"You see," she explained finally, "we will construct another ray machine and send it on through with you. That is your only chance to get back."

For the next few weeks we worked furiously. I had radioed my company for an extension of leave, which was

granted. One afternoon it was finished. Five o'clock came and we set the light-wave receiver according to Dad's instructions. Marion watched intently the message shown on the visascreen, then frowned and consulted Dad's notes again.

"I am afraid, Lou, there is something wrong. That certainly isn't your father's private code. Nor is it the international code which I know."

"Perhaps it is the same message that Dad has been receiving," I said.

"Yes, that must be it. For some reason your father is unable to send his message and these beings are trying to get in touch with you."

"Oh! I knew something had happened to him," I wailed. "Let me go through now, Marion. You can finish the other ray machine and send it on later."

"No," she replied. "You had better play safe and wait for the other machine."

It was morning before the machine was completed and I was able to start. I had dressed myself in my flying togs and strapped a .45 Colt and cartridges around me. A few clean handkerchiefs and a package of cigarettes completed my personal luggage.

Worried as I was, I was yet all athrill as I mounted the platform and gave Marion the signal to turn on the ray.

A faint glow surrounded me. I began to tingle from head to toe. Glancing at my hands I noticed that they glowed faintly. I was passing through! A sudden gap appeared in my consciousness —then the tingling sensation returned . . . ceased . . . and I had passed through.

FOR a few seconds I was bewildered. Then my head cleared. I was in an inclosure of some kind. The walls, ceiling and floor were snow white. I stooped and touched the floor. It felt like earth. I touched the walls—they were rock! I was in a cave, a snow-white cave!

A cave must have an entrance of some kind. I reasoned. so after packing the Hewitt Ray machine back into a corner I began to walk along the side of one of the walls. Three times the tunnel through which I was moving turned before I saw an opening. The brightness reflected from the white walls gradually gave place to a pale pink flush, which became deeper as I advanced until I came to an opening which was bathed in a rosy glow.

I stepped out cautiously and stood rooted to the spot in amazement. A softly-glowing red sun rode high in a pale pink sky. I was on a low hill whose path ran down into a forest of scarlet trees. Hurriedly I ran down the path, the earth of which was as white as the interior of the cave, to get a better look at the scarlet trees.

In a few moments I was among them. The leaves were bright scarlet, the trunks and branches snow-white like the ground. All around grew scarlet bushes, bursting into bloom with tiny silver-grey and pale amber-colored blossoms. A little farther on, a narrow brook rippled merrily and I decided to follow and see where it would lead me. All about lay peace and quiet. The air was soft and balmy, a direct contrast to the sharp winter winds I had left at home. It was a veritable fairyland.

At first I was a little fearful of meeting some strange animal or person but presently I became bolder and left the shadow of the trees, under which I had been traveling, and walked along the exposed bank of the brook.

Without the least warning, there broke upon the air the most frightful noise imaginable. Grasping my revolver I fled to the shelter of the trees and behind a broad white trunk I waited breathlessly as the dreadful noise drew near.

Nearer and nearer and louder and louder came the noise until there burst through the bushes to my right the most astonishing sight.

Two enormous creatures, whether men or animals, I could not at first determine, for they seemed to resemble

both, came tumbling into the road before me. They were engaged in a fight to the death. Screeching and yelling they grappled and fought, broke apart only to rush together again and tear and bite until, in disgust, I turned away.

When I looked toward them again one was on the ground, evidently in death agony, but the victorious one still kept up the frightful noise, at the same time tearing his still-living opponent apart. The sight so disgusted and infuriated me that I forgot my own precarious position and, lifting my automatic which I still clutched in my hand, I fired at the hideous monster.

At the bark of the gun the creature stopped his howling and stared stupidly about. At last, apparently locating the direction of the strange noise, he started in my direction. Thoroughly frightened now, I lifted the gun again but before I could bring my trembling fingers to pull the trigger, he suddenly stopped, staggered, and fell with a crash.

Upon the ground not very far apart lay the two great bodies. The one who had fallen in the battle was so mangled that I turned away to the one I had shot. The body, fully eight feet in length and weighing, I judged, around four hundred pounds, was covered completely by a short bristly hair. The feet and hands of the creatures were like great huge claws that looked cruel and powerful.

But the face! How shall I describe it? If the body, except for the clawlike hands and feet and the short hairs covering it, was human there was nothing human about the face. The monstrous head, looking too heavy even for the enormous and powerful body and neck supporting it, was flat on top and back, coming in front to a blunt point with two open nostrils.

The eyes, now fixed with a glassy stare, were small and green, and the mouth, a thick-lipped enormous slit, was drawn back in a snarl, showing a double row of sharp cruel teeth. There was no chin, the lower jaw sloping abruptly to the neck. All in all he was the most loathsome and fearful object it had ever been my misfortune to encounter.

CHAPTER III

Captured!

WITH an uncontrollable shudder I turned away. If this were a specimen of the inhabitants of the fourth dimension I must find my father immediately and take him back to our own world.

I walked on, wondering where my father was. Suddenly a twig cracked sharply in the bushes beside me. I looked about in swift alarm. Was I being stalked? With flying feet I made for the low trees ahead. A long howl came from behind me and the thud-thud-thud of a heavy fast-moving body.

Twang! Something flew by my head and to my horror a strange but wicked-looking arrow-like missile buried itself in the soft white earth before me. I ran on until the path abruptly ended at a wide chasm over which it was impossible for me to jump. I came to a halt. My hand quickly flew to the temporarily forgotten automatic at my side. Too late—my pursuer was right beside me and before I could draw my gun I felt clawlike hands clutching me and saw piggish eyes close to my own.

He picked me up and throwing me over his shoulder like a sack of flour, let out a howl of triumph and started swiftly through the trees. My sensations, then, were brief for with that howl coming so close beside me I sank into a merciful faint.

When I came to, I found myself lying on the ground completely surrounded by these repulsive creatures. No one touched me but all looked at me curiously, gibbering in excited guttural tones. Evidently I was a novel sight.

I sat up and there was a startled movement in the crowd. No one molested me and I sat there for some time surrounded by my curious audience. I was hungry but no one seemed to think of offering me food. Finally I lit a cigarette. If they were startled when I sat up they were panic-stricken at the sight of the tiny flame and smoke. They fled in all directions and gazed at me from a distance.

Finally a line of the creatures approached me, armed with bows and arrows. The leader courageously came forward and motioned for me to put down my fearful weapon. I ignored the obvious command and calmly blew a cloud of smoke towards him. Immediately a shower of arrows embedded themselves in the ground around me. I do not think they intended to wound me, they were merely warning me to obey, which I now prudently did. After that I was let alone and I began to stroll about, a group of the creatures following at a safe distance.

Look as I might I could see no sign of Dad. Deciding to try to get some information from these people I beckoned to one who seemed to be the leader and by various signs tried to ask him if there were another creature like myself in their midst.

At first he stared at me stupidly, then the little piggy eyes lit up and he turned and motioned me to follow. I did so with a beating heart. Perhaps they had Dad hidden away somewhere in this wilderness! Surely they were not the ones who had been sending messages to Dad. They were rank savages.

MY guide led me into a thicket and we followed a narrow path through the scarlet growth until we came to a clearing. There before us stood an aircraft of peculiar design and on the ground near it lay a woman. But what a woman! Tall almost as the creature beside me, she was magnificently proportioned. Short crisp black hair covered her head. Her face was beautiful but the features were set in grim lines.

An arrow had pierced her left breast and her clothing, a single blue tunic, was saturated with blood. She was dead but my heart lightened considerably at the sight of her and her aircraft. These savage beast men were not the only inhabitants of this place.

I turned from the figure of the dead woman and scrutinized closely the vehicle beside her. It was an aircraft of the enclosed cabin type. I had never seen one just like it before and I itched to get in and try out the various strange-looking controls I could see through the glass of the cabin door.

By pantomime I asked permission to enter and investigate the machine. But my guide, hastily placing himself between me and the car, motioned me away.

My hand slid along my belt and I cautiously grasped the butt of my gun, which my captors, ignorant of what it was, had not bothered to take away from me.

Quickly I drew and fired pointblank at the creature's leg. What a howl he let out! Between the noise of the shot and his terrible howling the whole pack would be there soon. I pulled open the door and hastily climbed into the plane.

"Oh God, please let it work!" I grasped a handle and pulled. With a suddenness that took my breath away, I shot vertically upward. Recovering I pushed the handle back to the first notch and the car ceased its upward flight and shot forward. I didn't know where I was going but I was on my way!

I flew in a straight line, hoping for a sight of civilization, but for mile after mile I could see nothing but the red sun above and the scarlet forests below.

Suddenly, as three tiny bulbs in the front of the cabin lit up, the vehicle swerved sharply to the right and I found myself traveling at a right angle to my previous direction. I was alarmed. I had made no change in the controls, yet of its own volition the car turned and traveled in the new direction at

terrific speed.

In the distance I made out a tiny speck which gradually, as my car hurled itself forward, became larger and larger until it assumed mountainous proportions. I was headed straight for it and none of my feverish manipulations of the levers or dials would swerve my car one inch!

Suddenly the speed of my car slackened and at an easy pace it glided to a gentle landing on top of what I took to be a flat-topped mountain. With hardly a perceptible jar the car halted and the tiny globes turned off.

Remote control! I had been guided here by an unseen force. Did they, whoever controlled the latter part of my trip, know I was coming and in that manner help me along—or had I accidentally come into the field of a control station? If so then there ought to be some sign of human habitation. But all I could see through my window was the flat top of this mountain or plateau.

JUST as I was wondering what I should do, I was gently lowered into this mountain! What next, I thought fearfully? But immediately the plane came to a halt and to my amazement I saw that it was in a line with many similar planes.

I opened the door and stepped out into what must have been a huge hangar. Then I heard a low hum and looking up in the direction of the sound I saw the roof open and another flying car gently descending. My own and the other cars moved soundlessly down the line making room for the descending machine, which settled into the place previously occupied by my own plane.

The door opened and out stepped a near counterpart of the dead woman in the scarlet forest! She looked startled at the sight of me for a moment, then gravely held her hand up palm outward in what I took to be a greeting. Just as gravely I returned the salute and the woman smiled and spoke in a strange tongue.

I answered in English. Though neither understood the other we simultaneously laughed and she companionably linked arms with me and led me to a wall. A row of buttons studded its side, one of which she pressed. After a slight click an opening appeared. Though I expected to step into some kind of an elevator there was nothing in front of us but a lighted space.

With grave misgivings, I let my companion lead me through and we gently sank down through the void. Then our descent became slower and ceased altogether before another door, through which we stepped. We were now, I reasoned, on the second floor from the top.

A long vista of hallways from great arched doors greeted us. Hurrying past many of them we at last entered one. At that moment I do not know exactly what I expected—some kind of oriental splendor, I suppose—but what I saw was only a very businesslike office of some sort, where many women were busy operating peculiar looking machines. They reminded me of the electrotypists at home.

Passing through this room we reached a private room and my companion motioned me to be seated. She then pushed a button on her desk and another woman from the outer office entered, carrying what looked like a football head gear with wire attachments.

Following my companion's example, I put the thing on my head, then looked at her. Smiling she spoke and to my astonishment I understood every word she said.

"Welcome, Visitor, to City Forty-three of the Second Evolutionary plane. I am Mavia, chief factor of this city, and in the name of my comrades-in-rule I welcome you and put ourselves and our city at your service."

I answered hesitatingly, "Thank you. I feel very strange. I am Lucile and I came here from the third dimension, looking for my father."

"Oh, you are from the third dimen-

sion? Really? I had no idea that the beings of the third dimension had evolved to the point of interdimensional travel. You said something about another of your world being here?"

"Yes, my father. He was receiving light-wave message from this world and by using an invention of his he came through. I was worried about him so I followed him through. Have you seen him?"

"No. I am sorry to say I have not. Nor have any of the other Second Evolutionary cities or I would have had a report on it."

My heart sank. Poor Dad—where was he? Mavia went on speaking.

"You say he was receiving light-wave messages? I think I can explain that. But first let me tell you about ourselves."

CHAPTER IV

The Three Evolutions

THIS world in which you now find yourself is the fourth dimension. In it are the beings of the First, Second and Third Evolutionary planes. The first plane consists of savages of a very low order—just now they are emerging from the beast stage into the human."

"Yes," I interrupted eagerly. "I was captured by them. They have killed one of your women and I escaped in her airplane."

Mavia seemed unmoved by the accident to her comrade. "That was Doona, my second in command. Against my advice she ventured alone in the scarlet forest. I recognized her plane in the hangar and wondered how you came to be using it. So she is dead? Well, we must all die sometime.

"The Second Evolutionary plane consists of ourselves. We have seventy-nine cities. Each city is like the one you are now in. They were originally mountains and our cities are built inside the mountains as a means of defense against the first and third planes, who are continually waging war of extermination against us.

"Our plane consists almost entirely of women. We keep just enough men to maintain the race. These few masculine creatures that we allow to live are kept in luxury and idleness. A long time ago the men were the ruling sex of this plane. But gradually the women demanded equal rights and it wasn't long before we were ruling the men. Those were bitter and bloody days. We call them in history 'The Sex War Epoch.'

"Eventually the women won and we destroyed millions of the despised masculine sex."

"Oh!" I said. "In our world the women are getting equal rights with the men. For a long time we, too, were held back, but now we stand shoulder to shoulder with the men. I hope *we* won't have any sex war."

"Time will tell," Mavia answered. "Now, Lucile, are there any questions you are eager to ask? I know you are hungry and we will continue our conversation after you have eaten and rested."

"First, tell me how it is that we understand each other when we both speak different languages?"

Mavia laughed. "It is very simple. By means of sensitized plates within these caps your spoken thoughts vibrate along those short wires and are received and translated by the wires on my cap and come to me as if spoken in my own language. The same thing happens to my spoken thoughts.

"We have had them from the time the men were the ruling sex. At that time each of our cities was a separate nation, speaking its own language and making its own laws and warring upon others. When the women took control of things we internationalized the languages and laws and now each city is

a part of one great whole. The Second Evolutionists are now equal to the Thirds in every way."

"How was it," I asked, "that we did not crash when we stepped into that void between floors?"

"Because the minute we stepped off the floor our bodies lost almost all weight with the lessened force of gravity from above the shaft. Now, Lucile, I am going to take you to my apartment where you will rest and eat, for I have much more to tell you and tomorrow is to be a busy day. Come with me."

We left the office and floated down another shaft to the floor below, Mavia explaining, as we went, the general layout of the floors we were traversing. The top floor was devoted entirely to the airplanes. The second floor—that is, the next to the top—was the office floor, and the third to the tenth were devoted to the living quarters of these remarkable women. I was extremely worried about Dad but felt confident that Mavia would help me to find him.

When we stepped onto the third floor I was startled to see an immense insect crawling towards me. I drew back in alarm. Mavia said, "Don't be afraid. That is one of our servants. It is of the ant family and by careful breeding we have developed them to this size. They make highly efficient servants, each one trained to its own task."

I NOTICED in the center of this hallway, or street as Mavia called it, a wide section in the floor, bisected and moving along in opposite directions while at either side an equally wide strip remained stationary. We now stepped onto the moving roadway and were carried at a swift pace to our destination.

Mavia's apartment was strictly utilitarian, bare almost to emptiness. Only the most necessary furniture stood about. I expressed a desire for a bath and she ushered me into a room and instructed me to strip except for the thought-transferring apparatus and stand under what I took to be a shower. She then turned a wheel and a bright light filtered down on me.

"Where is the soap and water?" I asked.

Mavia said, "This is our method of cleansing and rejuvenating the body. Radioactive rays cleanse the skin and penetrate the pores, revivifying the body with new life and strength."

It was true. The dust and grime I had collected disappeared and although I had been feeling fatigued I now felt as if I had been resting. Mavia presented me with one of her tunics to wear instead of my cumbersome flying suit.

We went next into the dining room and Mavia, dismissing three giant insect servants, waited on me herself. First she went to the wall and operated a machine that resembled a portable typewriter. Then she opened a section of a wall and pulled out a table with dishes and service on it. By the time she had arranged it a slight buzzing over the typewriter affair was heard and Mavia removed from a section in the wall a little tray. Strange but delicious foods were placed before me and I ate heartily.

During the course of the meal I asked her where the food came from and she said that on the thirty-first floor were the kitchens where food for the whole city was prepared and on the floors thirty-two to fifty agriculture was successfully carried on by means of artificial sunlight and irrigation.

"Mavia, tell me," I asked finally, "do you think you could help me find my father?"

"If he is where I think he is, perhaps I can."

"Thank you," I replied. "Please go on with your descriptions of the three evolutions of your world."

Mavia complied. "After the war there was complete chaos for a while. Women were not used to their power and it went to their heads. They wanted to kill every male creature in the second

evolutionary plane, for they were tired of child-bearing and child-rearing. A few of us who were able to withstand the headiness of our triumph took hold of things and prevented the complete extermination of the males until we could see whether or not they were necessary to the future of our race."

"I should think," I interrupted, "that with your advanced knowledge of science you would have been able to produce young without the actual help of the male."

Mavia laughed. "We did try it and you should have seen the results. Perfect monstrosities. We did not want our race to deteriorate, so we went back to the age-old method.

"The males who had escaped extermination were put through rigid physical and mental tests. Those of a high average are all housed on the twelfth floor, as you call it, and these men are called the reproducing males.

"Every woman is required by law to give to the city two children which, by improved scientific methods, she does with a minimum of pain and time.

"The males whose intelligence average was below our mental standard but who had physical beauty were made sterile by a special process and housed on the thirteenth tier."

"But you don't need these sterile men," I said.

Mavia smiled grimly. "We changed a lot of things but we are unable to change the fundamental instincts. When we women have borne two children to the race we are not allowed to reproduce a third time. Nevertheless the old biological urge returns and then we find use for the sterile males."

"But that is downright immoral," I objected.

MAVIA frowned. "What is morality? Isn't it living in such a manner that you are able to give the best of yourself to the race to which you belong? But let's get back to our explanations of the three evolutionary planes. We, you understand, are of the Second Evolution. There is yet another plane, called the Third, whose inhabitants are our deadly enemies.

"They are horrible grotesque creatures, with abnormal mental developments. They have tiny weak bodies and enormous heads. Clever machines carry them around and do the physical acts that their little wizened bodies are incapable of performing."

"Why are they your enemies?" I asked, curiously.

"They fear us," Mavia replied. "They are afraid that we will evolve to the point where we shall take their place. We shall probably have to exterminate them for the safety of our own race. Now about those light-wave messages—"

Just then a knock sounded and about fifteen women entered, all wearing the thought-wave caps. They were prepared to meet and converse with me.

Mavia introduced them. They were all fine, intelligent well-developed good-looking women and they gazed at me with disguised curiosity.

"Comrades-in-rule," she said, "just as you came in I was explaining something to our visitor which I think will be of interest to you as well. A man whom she calls 'Father' had been receiving light-wave messages from this world. By means of a disintegrating ray this 'Father' has traveled through from the third dimension to this one. Lucile was captured by the First Evolutionists and 'Father' was not with them. We know that he is not with us, therefore he must be with the Thirds.

"As you know, the Thirds are planning a raid upon us and no doubt the light-wave messages that 'Father' has been intercepting were calls for reinforcements from those horrible beings of the second dimension."

A murmur of horror came from the women. It amused me to hear Mavia call Dad "Father" as if that were his given name.

Mavia went on. "My suggestion is

this—the Thirds do not know we have this knowledge of their proposed raid, so why not take them unaware by a midnight attack and with our newly-perfected rays wipe them out of existence?"

A cheer went up and it was quite a few minutes before I could make myself heard. "My Father!" I wailed. "If he is with these Third Evolutionists and you wipe them out—what will happen to him?"

"I'm afraid it is unavoidable, but if he is with them he will have to go too."

Hysterically I began to cry and beg them to save my father from destruction. They gazed at me in amazement. I suppose such an exhibition of emotion was totally unfamiliar to them. Finally Mavia awkwardly patted my back and said, "I'm sorry if we wounded your sensibilities, but we, of this world, are accustomed to considering the good of the race before individual preferences. Yet you are our guest and we will make an exception in your favor."

"You mean you will save my father?" I cried joyfully and to everyone's astonishment I threw my arms around Mavia.

"Just a second," she cried. "I do not promise positively that we will be able to save him, but we will endeavor for your sake to do so. You, Calissia, I appoint as guide and instructor to our visitor. Show her over the city."

CHAPTER V

Exploring

CALISSIA I found to be a very pleasant companion and with her I explored the city. We dropped down an express shaft from the third tier to the eleventh. There the scientists worked.

The whole floor was a huge laboratory and I met many women who had heard of my presence and were anxious to meet me. Many of them tried to explain to me the wonders of the various experiments they were conducting, but I am afraid that most was beyond me. But how Dad would have enjoyed it!

On the twelfth floor were the quarters for reproducing men. I will admit I was anxious to see them. We went straight to the recreation section, where we found hundreds of men walking around or reclining in comfortable chairs reading. They were not as tall as the women and were dressed almost similarly. I expected to see effeminate creatures simpering about but instead I found a group of men who, except for their peculiar shoulder-length hair, might have been men of my own world.

On the next floor, however, my expectations were more than justified. Curled and perfumed and elaborately dressed, these unfortunate creatures gazed coyly at us and I urged Calissia to take me away at once.

The fifteenth tier held the city nurseries where, cared for by the giant insects, were children of both sexes. Poor little mites! They simply walked gravely around or played sedately with educational toys. There did not seem to be that spontaneous joy of living, characteristic of the children of our own world.

The sixteenth tier contained the hospital, where feminine doctors and assistants bustled efficiently about. We went on down through the next fourteen floors where factories and centers of manufacture were located.

Tier thirty-one I explored extensively. Food in huge quantities was being prepared and I thought of what a boon such a system would be to many tired housewives. Huge automatic refrigerating systems helped keep the food pure.

We next visited the agriculture tiers. From tier thirty-two to tier fifty inclusive were acre upon acre of growing crops. Overhead were immense lights that supplied the sunlight needed by all growing things. while cleverly arranged

sprinklers water the crops. All about were the giant insects industrially farming.

Tier fifty-one, Calissia informed me, was set aside for the exclusive use of the huge ants, where they had their living, breeding and training quarters. When I declined to visit them Calissia suggested that we return to Mavia's apartment.

"Are there no more tiers?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," Calissia replied. "There are many more, some even below ground, but they are used mostly as granaries, store houses and burial vaults for the ashes of our dead. And below them are the old unused prisons."

"What do you do with your prisoners if you do not use the prisons?"

"We do not have any prisoners. If anyone shows criminal tendencies she is scientifically treated to eradicate such impulses. If the treatments are successful she is restored to society. If they are not she is painlessly put out of the way."

ON the way to the upgoing shaft, Calissia showed me ultra-violet artificial sunlight containers that diffused an even health-giving light over the whole city. Nearby were the machines for manufacturing the artificial air which they breathed.

We had by then reached an express shaft going straight up to the third tier. Curious, I asked as we were drawn swiftly upward by an unseen force, how this shaft was operated. Calissia explained that when we stepped into the bottom of the upward going shaft we kept our proper weight but huge magnetic beams from above drew us irresistibly upward.

When we reported to Mavia, she requested Calissia to preside over the trial of an insubordinate reproducing male. When it was suggested that perhaps I would find it interesting to attend I agreed willingly and accompanied Calissia back to the twelfth tier.

We found a group of five women, seated comfortably, while before them stood the defendant, his head thrown back and a light of rebellion flashing from his handsome dark eyes.

Calissia took her place and motioned me to a seat beside her. She then requested them all, the man included, to put on the thought-wave caps so that I could follow the trial. While one of the women procured and distributed the caps I studied the defendant.

Straight as a sapling, he stood before us. He was very good-looking. I suppose, being a woman, it was natural that I should notice his good looks first of all.

Back home I had had no time for the usual run of men, though I was by no means a manhater. Some day, if I ever met the right man, I knew I would marry. But somehow or other the men with whom I came into contact either left me cold or, if they did appeal to me, aroused my antagonism by their airs of superiority.

But back to the trial. Calissia was speaking. "What is the charge against the defendant?"

One of the women arose and said, "He is charged with talking sedition to the other men, of trying to arouse them to revolt against the present system of government. We have a witness."

Calissia called for the witness and another man was ushered in. His air of cringing subservience disgusted me and I noticed that even the other women looked at him with contempt.

"Your name and position?" asked Calissia.

"I am Soonta, Section Head, Number Six," the newcomer answered with a sly glance of malice at the defendant. "That man has been a source of trouble ever since he was sent up to us from the training rooms.

"Finally he got so bad that he declared he would die rather than submit to such a life. He refused to meet the women when they came to visit us and sulked in his room. I tried all the known ways of making him conform to cus-

tom but it was useless."

"Very well, Soonta, I will make a note of your zeal. You may go now. Defendant, what is your name and what have you to say in your defense?"

The defendant spoke and a thrill of sympathy went through me as I listened to his proud reply. "My name is Joburza and the charges against me are perfectly true. I abhor the present system of government and I hate you women. You are tyrants of the worst sort. I refuse to submit to this reproduction. When you condemn me I will gladly go to the Lethal Chamber."

"No doubt," Calissia sneered. "But I think that with a few treatments in the electro-coma room to reduce your present mentality and a passage through the bonite-ray sterilizer you will be ready to take your place with the thirteenth-tier men."

Joburza visibly wilted. "I beg you. Grant me the boon of death!"

The women laughed and one of them said, "Once you pass through the mentality-reducing room you won't care very much. We will see that special attention is given to eradicating your pride."

"Won't you have any pity?" Joburza pleaded.

I COULD not stand the cruelty any longer, so presuming on my status as a welcome visitor, I asked permission to speak. "I have a request to make. I am a woman like yourselves. If it is not offending your customs I would like you to let me have the prisoner to do with as I wish."

Astonished silence greeted my request and Joburza gazed at me suspiciously. "Would you mind telling us what you wish to do?" Calissia asked.

"I want to take him back to my dimension with me for"—I thought desperately—"for scientific experiments!"

"A peculiar request," Calissia stated. "But then, having you here is a peculiar situation. What do you say, comrades-in-rule? Personally, I am in favor of it. At least it is a novel form of punishment."

The other five women agreed and, carefully hiding my elation, I asked to speak to the prisoner alone. When the others had gone I asked him if he were glad that he was saved from his punishment.

"I do not know," he replied stiffly. "Perhaps the experiments you have in store for me will be more degrading."

"Poor Joburza!" I said. "Cheer up! I have no wish to experiment with you. I only said that because I wanted to have you turned over to me. I want to help you."

"Help me?" he questioned. You mean—?"

"I mean, Joburza, that I will take you through to my world, where everyone, men and women alike, has a chance to live and work. You will be free, absolutely free, to live your life as you see fit. Do you understand now?"

"Is it possible?" he murmured. "It seems too good to be true. How can I thank you?"

"You needn't even try. Just show me by your conduct when we reach my world that I have not made a mistake."

"I will!" he promised, tears of gladness coming into his eyes.

Just then Calissia came in and said Mavia wished to see me in her office. "I think she has some good news for you."

Requesting her to see that my prisoner was taken care of, I fairly raced up to Mavia. "*Ho!*" she jested. "I hear you have a prisoner. I think turning him over to the third dimensioners is a very good joke." She laughed heartily.

"Yes, indeed!" I replied brightly.

"I have something I want to show you."

On one side of her office was an affair that I had taken to be a radio. Mavia twirled a few dials and the wall above it lit up. I looked and saw waving scarlet trees with the setting sun, now

a great lavender ball, sinking slowly behind them. *"Oh!"* I exclaimed. "Television! How beautiful. This seems just like looking out of doors."

"Wait just a second." Mavia set the lower dial and plugged in a short wire. I suddenly had the sensation of traveling at a terrible speed. The scenery flashed by. Huge mountain after mountain was passed in a second.

"Those are our other cities. The bifocal wave is picking them up and recording them on the screen as it passes on its way to its focus. Watch closely—I think you will be interested."

The last mountain passed. We came to the end of the scarlet vegetation. Great barren wastes flashed by. In the distance, but rapidly looming large as we came closer, was a dense purple mist. For a few seconds the screen was clouded. Then it cleared and we were over what looked like a great bee farm.

Down we dropped. Hive after hive passed us. I call them hives but in reality they were houses. We swerved and a hive larger by far than the others completely filled the screen.

CHAPTER VI

Dad Again!

SUDDENLY the screen changed. We seemed to have penetrated the wall and a great metal door barred our path. Through that we went and a complete room was before us.

The grotesque-looking creatures in the room I recognized, from Mavia's previous description, as the beings of the third Evolution. And in the center of the room, talking earnestly was . . .

"Dad!" I cried, completely forgetting that what I saw was only a reproduction of a scene actually thousands of miles away.

"Is that 'Father'?" Mavia inquired. "I thought so! We located him about an hour ago and fifty of our best women scouts have gone to rescue him. Do not worry about 'Father' now. He will be here with you shortly. Do you wish to watch the battle? No, I believe it would be too harrowing." She switched off the screen.

"You see," she continued, "by sending these scouts to get 'Father' the Thirds will not be looking for another attack tonight and consequently they will be off their guard."

I asked Mavia to tune in again but instead she began to question me about the Hewitt Ray. I told her all I understood about it and she suggested that while we were waiting we should try to locate the cave in which I had left the second model.

While she was directing the unseen eye over the countryside I said, "I suppose you are anxious to get rid of us. My father and I are causing you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all," she answered. "We enjoyed having you here—but only as visitors. When your visit is completed you must go back."

"Will you explain something that has been puzzling me, Mavia?" I asked. "I always understood that if a being of one dimension passed through into another dimension, he would find everything appearing to him at odd angles or in cross sections. How is it that everything seems the same to me?"

"I know what you mean," Mavia answered. "But when an object passes from one dimension into another it immediately takes on the dimensional proportions of the new plane of existence. That is why we look normal to you and you look normal to me."

She located the cave containing the machine and, after taking the figures denoting the exact spot, pressed a button and gave orders to a woman who entered to recover it.

We next went to her apartment and she and I both refreshed ourselves with the radioactive bath. While we were resting a knock was heard, the door

opened and Dad and his rescuers came in.

I flew to his arms and could hardly let him go in my delight.

"Dear me! Dear me! It's *you*, Lucile?" Dad's eyes were twinkling. "I thought for a minute that one of those strange ladies was hugging me."

AMID much laughter, Mavia dismissed the scouts and ordered a meal for the three of us. Dad related his experiences. His eyes shone with delight as he told of the new science he had learned by this trip. He did not seem to realize that he had been in grave danger.

"You know," he was saying to Mavia, "Those Thirds, as they call themselves, are mighty smart creatures. Miss Mavia, do you know I nearly conducted a war against you young ladies? I understood from the Thirds that you were a bunch of savages, threatening to pull down their civilization with its accumulated scientific knowledge. And here you are, a group of pretty ladies playing at politics."

"I think you will find us doing a little more than playing," Mavia said coldly. "And as for scientific knowledge, you won't find us far behind the Thirds. Now, Lucile, I am going to be very busy for the next hour or two. We have decided to set the hour of attack ahead and I must go. You and 'Father' have the freedom of the city."

"Mavia, before you go I want to—" I began.

"No 'Thank yous' if you please. You are our guest and it was our duty to help you." And she was gone!

Dad and I looked at each other. He had a heavy frown. "Come, come, young lady! I want to know what you mean by following me around this way?"

"Now Dad! Don't play the heavy father. I am dying of curiosity to know how you were rescued. Mavia shut off the screen before the excitement started. What happened?"

"Why, I hardly know myself. I was explaining the use of certain explosives in warfare to the Chodrom or head Third, when suddenly the walls of the room began to crumble. Through the openings came beams of light that, when they touched the Thirds caused them to crumble just as had the walls. To my surprise the beams flashed over everything, leaving me unhurt.

"Then a bunch of curiously-armored young women rushed into the room, grabbed me and hustled me out the opening, where I saw a number of aircraft surrounding the building and operating the deadly rays that were destroying it. I presume from its action that the ray is derived from a very low wavelength of the ultra-violet, which after it had passed a wavelength of—"

"Oh, Dad!" I cut in impatiently. "What happened next?"

"Well, almost immediately we took to the air. For a few moments I was scared stiff, I mean literally. As you know I had never gone up in an airplane before, but soon there was enough excitement to take my mind from my fright at finding myself in the air.

"As we neared the great purple mists my pilot gave me an insulating suit to put on. Those purple mists, you know, are the main protection of the Thirds. Heretofore nothing had been able to come through them and live but these women have found a way to protect themselves. We passed through the mists safely and here we are!"

"I am glad you are here and not with the Thirds, for after tonight there won't be any Thirds," I said, trying to make him realize how extremely dangerous his position had been.

"Yes, yes—I know. It is terrible. Such scientific knowledge these great people have and they use it to try to annihilate each other. Why, the Thirds have discovered that life is but—"

Anticipating a long scientific discourse, I interrupted. "Dad, you must come down to the eleventh tier and see what these *women* have done in the way

of science."

I left him there, happy in his own environment, and hastened away to find Mavia.

SHE was in her office and I begged her to let me accompany her on the raid. She firmly refused me but promised that I could use her viewing screen and see what was happening. While we were talking a scout entered and made her report.

The Thirds, it seemed, had suceeded in getting into communication with the beings of the second dimension and thousands of them had come through and were inhabitating the purple mists, which had been expanded to cover completely the Third Evolutionists' domain.

"Oh damn!" said Mavia, or whatever its equivalent is in her language.

"May I suggest something?" I asked timidly.

"Yes, of course," Mavia snapped. "If you have a way of helping us, say so."

"By using my father's Hewitt Ray, I could set you and your whole army down in the center of the Thirds. The people of the second dimension could not harm you as you go through the mists."

"H'm. And once we gain an entrance we will make very short work of the Thirds. But, young woman, have you considered that after we have finished with the Thirds we will be unable to pass it to get home!"

I smiled in triumph. "Mavia, if you take me with you I promise to bring you back safely through the mists."

"You certainly are a determined young woman, are you not? Very well! You have earned your place in our ranks."

The next few hours were very busy ones for me. Following my instructions, Mavia ordered an extra Hewitt Ray machine to be built, which the scientists, with Dad's help, erected in short order. I was given an insulating suit to put on.

"It will protect you from the rays of the Thirds but may your deity, whoever he is, help you if you come in contact with the Second Dimensioners."

"What terrible weapon do they use?" I asked.

"That is just it," answered one of the scouts who was putting on her own insulating suit. "We do not know. They are great obnoxious-looking winged creatures. Their bodies emit sparks that annihilate all they touch. We have never been able to insulate ourselves against them. For some reason the electrically-charged purple mists seem to be the only place in which they can live in this dimension."

Finally all was in readiness. The two Hewitt Ray machines were brought up to the mountaintop and Dad was detailed to operate the one which was to send us forth. Imagine, if you can, the scene. Dad at one end of the mountain top with his Hewitt Ray machine, the other Hewitt Ray machine in the center, a guard of fifty women surrounding it, whose sole duty was to protect it from the rays of the Thirds. Spread out in close formation were the soldier women, not only of our own city but of the other seventy-eight cities as well. Column after column of glittering armored women.

Mavia, at whose side I was stationed, gave the signal and—one second we were on the mountain top—the next we were inside the surrounding circle of the purple mists!

Then hell broke loose! Our women began to fan out, sowing destruction in their wake. The hive-like houses in our immediate vicinity, at the touch of the destructive rays wielded by our soldiers, crumbled up and disappeared in a puff of smoke. The Thirds in the outlying houses quickly retreated and erected their enormous machines, which shot forth beams of light.

Their beams had a greater focus than our ray guns but our women in their insulating suits suffered no great damage. A few here and there whose suits, I suppose, were defective, stiffened out

and fell to the ground.

I looked back to see if any harm had come to the Hewitt Ray machine. The fifty women surrounding it were directing great beams of light in all directions, forming a light barrier, which I later learned was able to stop and deflect any destructive beam which might be directed towards the machine.

IT WAS all highly exciting but so entirely different from the bloody carnage we of our world expect in battle that it seemed like some great pageant in which I was taking part.

I marched with the rest of the soldiers and directed my ray gun on the Thirds and their houses. They were such inhuman-looking creatures with their thin machine-like bodies and great globular heads that when they crumbled and disappeared as my ray touched them I felt no revulsion as I might have had they been more human-looking. Instead, I cheered wildly at each victory.

We marched fanwise to the edge of the purple mists, leaving not a living thing in our paths except the unfortunate women who had fallen under the beams of the Thirds. Reaching the mist, we directed our ray guns into it, trying to get some of the great creatures inhabiting it.

Now that we were so close to the mist, we could see them plainly, great bodies with bat-like wings and tiny heads. Their red fiery eyes seemed to occupy the greater part of the small heads. They grimaced and gestured horribly at us and threw out sparks from their bodies.

We retreated to a safe distance and yelled our defiance at them. Tiring of this sport, the victorious army of women returned, singing and shouting, to the Hewitt Ray machine with its guard still surrounding it.

It was my duty now to operate the ray machine and I had no intention of being left behind. I set the automatic controls as Dad had shown me, then stepped in front into my place.

The softly glowing ray shot forth and we were back on our own mountain top. Dad, who had been anxiously watching the battle through Mavia's viewing screen, hurried to greet us on our return.

"Lucile, I did not know you were such a bloodthirsty savage. I watched you through the television and you certainly did your share of destruction and seemed to be enjoying yourself immensely!"

"Well, Dad, if you *will* go adventuring off into strange worlds you cannot blame your daughter if she follows in your footsteps."

"Just the same," he said, his eyes twinkling, "I think we had better go home before you can find any more trouble to get into."

"Yes," I admitted. "I have only three weeks' leave and I must get a little rest before I go back to work."

While Dad readjusted the Hewitt Ray to take us back I sent for Joburza, my prisoner, and introduced him to Dad. I told him of the trial and its results.

Dad laughed and said, "Well, well! I never heard of a woman yet, who did not want to take back some kind of a souvenir from her travels. I suppose I should be thankful you did not collect a whole cart-load."

"Of course you should," I agreed cheerfully.

Amid the friendliest goodbyes from our strange friends and with their hearty invitation to return some day ringing in our ears, Dad and I and our prisoner passed through the ray and after a few seconds found ourselves in Dad's laboratory.

"Wake up," I cried, shaking Marion, who had fallen asleep before the light-wave machine. "We're home!"

TIRED as we were, there was no thought of sleep that night. Marion demanded to be told every little bit of our adventures. It took almost all night to tell the tale completely and explain

all the strange things we had found in the other dimension. Marion declared herself to be a member of the party on the next trip. She was much interested in the women of the fourth dimension.

"I always thought *we* were emancipated," she said, "but this Mavia and her crowd are emancipated-plus."

While we were eating a very early breakfast I asked Dad, "How was it, Dad, that you and I landed in different places? You landed in the country of the Thirds while I landed with the savage Firsts."

Dad explained. "Due to the curvature of space we did not travel in a straight line. You took off at a different time and consequently landed at the other side of the circle. Understand?"

"Ye-s-s, I think I do," I replied hesitatingly.

Joburza, whom I promptly re-christened John, fitted easily into our life. He learned our language quickly but spoke it with a curiously quaint accent. Dad, discovering that he had an aptitude for science, readily took him into his laboratory as a pupil-assistant.

"My son was a daughter, so I have adopted this boy," he explained laughingly to his friends.

I liked John very much but he exasperated me by his timidity with women. Poor boy, with his background, I suppose he could not help himself.

One day about six months later I returned to the house for my three-day leave and found John meekly taking a scolding from our housekeeper. I sharply sent her about her business, then turned to John.

"Why do you do it, John? Brace up! Remember you are a *man*. Forget your other life. You are in a different world now. Remember, women aren't anything to be afraid of. They can't hurt you. Just say to yourself, 'I am a *man*,' and *be* one! If a woman doesn't agree with you, bully her. She will like it. Try it some time and see how it works."

"I believe I will," John said and, grabbing me, he kissed me!

"Why, John!" I cried, astonished. "What made you do that?"

My father was standing by the window. He laughed. "Poor John was only taking your advice— 'Bully them!' Seriously, Lucile, I thought you wanted men to admit women's superiority."

"Oh well!" I answered nonchalantly, glancing out of the corner of my eye at John. "It all depends on who the man is!"

"Oh-h-h! I see." Dad smiled and with exaggerated solicitude tip-toed from the room.

We recommend THE SEED FROM SPACE, a novel of Earth's strangest invasion by FLETCHER PRATT, in the May issue of—

STARTLING STORIES

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NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

"I'm an outstanding witch too," Rosalie announced. "Listen—"

The Ambassador's Tomcat

By ALLEN K. LANG

The Dionysian delegate had the Interplanetary Council in his symbiotic pocket — until his pet got a ribbing!

THE seventeen clerks of the Department of Protocol and Ceremony, more generally called EXTS, raised their eyes in wonderment as a red-haired girl with a green dress, which appeared to have been lacquered on, slammed into their office. Rippling angrily over to the desk which stood beneath the sign, *Chief of Protocol,* the girl slapped down her clipboard.

"*Joe!*" she shouted. "I got the order. That xenologist, the doctor with the improbable name, will *have* to see me now."

"Really, Rosalie! The affairs of this

department must be conducted in a dignified manner. Now, what is it you wish to see Doctor McAleer about?"

"Joe, two planetary systems are revolving around a tomcat—and you still insist on taking that 'Ceremony and Protocol' business seriously? Don't get up, Joe. I know where to find Doctor Grenville McAleer—centrifuge, PhD and all."

Before Joe could rise to bar her way, Rosalie had swung around his desk and entered the door marked *Department of Xenological Study,* slamming it after her.

"Hi, Leery!" Rosalie shouted across the laboratory. A spherical object resembling a large toasted cocklebur looked up from the eyepieces of a binocular 'scope and emitted a groan.

"Rosalie, why the devil did you have to show up now? I won't be able to think logically for the rest of the day. You've inflamed my libido, upset my endocrine balance and wreaked havoc on my thalamus. And you've been here only twenty seconds. Go away."

"Frankly, Leery, I'm not much interested in the condition of your viscera. I'm here to get that Dionysian cat." She waved her clipboard before Doctor McAleer's eyes. "I've got a Council order for him."

Doctor McAleer lowered his face into the palm of his left hand, a gesture bespeaking great spiritual anguish. With his right thumb he pointed over his shoulder to the far corner of his laboratory, where a purple puff-ball lay in a wire cage. "That mauve mess in the corner is the cat."

ROSALIE dropped her clipboard on the desk and hurried over to the cage. Strumming her fingers across the wire she sang, "Kitty, kitty, kitty! Why, Leery, he's beautiful! You're all cerebral cortex, unable to see the better things of life. Look at that soft fur!"

An eyelid opened at one end of the cat, exposing an orange eye which looked up at Rosalie without interest. Snorting like a small volcano the cat closed his eyes and went back to sleep.

"You think he's beautiful, do you? He's an imposition on my good-nature, that's what he is. Here we see a normally-stupid polychromatic specimen of the Dionysian Nightmare Cat which somebody was fool enough to transport across fifty parsecs of space. Doesn't make sense. It's like hauling a wart-hog out to Pluto just for laughs. And do you know who owns this atrocity?"

"Eb, the ambassador from Dionysius."

"Precisely. You know what unspeakable practical jokers the Dionysians are, I suppose. If I let this cat out of quarantine and it explodes in the Assembly Hall, spreads a virus disease which turns people blue or bites a chunk out of the Martian delegate's leg—*I'll* be held responsible."

The doctor ran his fingers through his close-cropped hair. "Oh, why did Mrs. McAleer's little boy have to grow up to be a xenologist?"

"Granted that you have it rough, Leery. But you'll be lots worse off if you don't give me that cat right now. Eb is mighty touchy—you know how it hurts him the way people laugh about his lisp. If you don't give his cat back to him he may throw his weight around to have you reassigned to the backside of Pluto's moon to do ecological studies on a minor fungus. Give me that cat!"

"Believe me, Sex Appeal—I'm not holding the beast in quarantine because I find him a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Far from it—I go snow-blind every time I look at that rainbow."

"Rainbow—that's a good name for him." Rosalie unlatched the cage door and took the purple kitten out of his cage. The newly-christened Rainbow curled against the girl like a mauve muff, flashing his orange eyes up at her and licking her arm with his yellow tongue. "Good kitty," Rosalie approved.

"Put that monster back in his cage," Doctor McAleer ordered.

"Nothing doing, Friend. I'm taking

Rainbow to his master. Orders—the papers are on your desk."

"Let's talk it over, Beautiful. Here's my argument—I don't know what Eb's idea was in bringing Rainbow here but I'm sure his motive is something pretty nasty. Something which will give all the delegates to the Assembly asthma and hives and shatter them in spirit and in limb."

"You think Rainbow is a gimmick in one of Eb's practical jokes, eh? Seems reasonable. He was the guy who filled Mars City's water-supply reservoir with little plastic alligators, about ten million of them."

"Do you remember a couple of years back when he fooled with the radio of the Bolivian president's honeymoon yacht? The ship got about halfway between Mars and Jupiter, then the radio started broadcasting a string of SOS's. Every Extraterrestrial Servicecraft in the zone rallied 'round—and the Service grilled the poor honeymooners for eighteen hours. Fine wedding present!"

"The man who would do that deserves to be roasted over a slow fire," Rosalie said feelingly.

"Or given a molasses rubdown and buried in an ant hill. I know that there's something fishy about Rainbow or Eb wouldn't have him around. I just can't figure what the gimmick is though."

"Eb said something about his being in 'intellectual symbiosis' with Rainbow, whatever that is."

"Symbiosis, schymbiosis!" McAleer said scornfully. "The Dionysian Nightmare Cat has a rationality quotient of double-oh-three. A cabbage could outthink one of these birds. Rainbow's purpose in the universe is to sleep and to insult the eyeballs of his intellectual betters."

"With that big head he's dumb?" Rosalie asked.

"I noticed that, too. This animal has a medulla oblongata way out of proportion to the rest of its brain. I use the term loosely, you understand." McAleer stood deep in thought, gnawing meditatively at the knuckle of his right thumb. Taking the thumb from his mouth, he turned to Rosalie.

"Beautiful, do you suppose that you could get Eb to come here to pick up his cat? I'd like to see about that 'intellectual symbiosis.' Tell Eb that he's to observe a special Rinderpest checkup, anything."

"I'll have him here in an hour."

"Good kid." McAleer turned from Rosalie to grab up a handful of hypodermic syringes from the table. "Be sure he shows up," he called to the departing girl.

IN TWENTY-THREE minutes by the laboratory clock the Dionysian ambassador, accompanied by Rosalie, presented himself at the door. Conscious of the effect his lisp had on a human audience Eb spoke with great care. "Good morning, thir. I wath told that my pet ith here and that I may pick him up."

"Good morning, Your Excellency. Yes, we're holding your cat here until you've witnessed a special examination. Just regulations, you know."

"We mutht put up with thith thort of thing, I thuppose. You may protheed."

"Very well. Will you please hand me the hypo of polyfluoride from the table behind you?" Eb turned to the laboratory bench, where six hypodermic syringes, each loaded with a different-colored fluid, were lying. Without hesitation he picked up the second syringe from the left and handed it to Doctor McAleer. The doctor placed the syringe on his desk and picked up Rainbow. With cautious fingers he felt at the colorful cat's lower jaw.

"There's no gross malformation of the travis dorsalis, Your Excellency. You are free to take your pet with you now. I hope that you will forgive this routine unpleasantness, sir."

"Of courth, Doctor. It 'th part of my duty to undergo thith thort of red-tape. Good morning, thir." Eb slung his cat across his shoulder and walked out.

The instant that Eb closed the door

McAleer began to recite, "Twelve times twelve are . one-hundred-forty-four—twelve times eleven are one-hundred-thirty-two—twelve times ten equal . . ." Rosalie looked at him with astonishment but McAleer continued all the way down the multiplication table to "one times one." There he stopped.

"Why all that?" Rosalie demanded.

"Figure it for yourself, Kid. Why would Eb drag a dumb beast like Rainbow all the way from Dionysius? Evidently the animal is useful to Eb in dealing with us humans. How? Well, do you remember what happened when I asked His Excellency to hand me the hypodermic of polyfluoride?"

"Yes. He picked the right one without stopping to think. Do you mean that he's telepathic?"

"When Rainbow is with him, yes. That's why I was mumbling the multiplication table as he left. I couldn't let him know what I was really thinking—so I hid my thoughts behind a curtain of arithmetic."

"Faulty arithmetic, Doctor. Six times seven are not fifty-four."

"This sort of thing is the result of letting women learn to read." McAleer sighed. "You've missed the point."

"Oh, my Aunt Bessy! I see what you mean. Eb will have that cat with him in the Assembly and he'll know what the Earth delegates are thinking."

"Right! Give the little lady a big cigar!"

"What good is a diplomat when another diplomat can read his mind. Lordy! Eb will fly home to Dionysius with Earth in his suitcase."

"He's depending on Rainbow to find out exactly what the delegates of the fifteen planets have to offer so he can demand it. He'll expose the skeletons in Italy's closets. He'll rake up Martian scandals. He'll blackmail the Venusian delegation."

"We'll tell the Extraterrestrial Service, and they'll have Provost Marshal bar Rainbow from the floor," Rosalie suggested.

"That would take thirty-seven affidavits, filled out in triplicate and filed as photostats in the EXTS Archives," McAleer dryly pointed out. "About six months, that would take."

"We'll have to stop Eb ourselves then. Drop a large rock on Rainbow or put ground glass in his feed. That last idea is out—the ugly beast looks as though he'd been weaned on busted bottles."

"Thought you liked the cat's color scheme. Oh well, it's a woman's prerogative. Trouble with your schemes is that they'd bring on a diplomatic incident, a contingency much to be deplored. Frankly I don't know what to do."

Rosalie put her arm around McAleer's waist and leaned her head on his shoulder. "Don't worry, boy. With my brains and your good looks we'll have an idea before tomorrow."

THE next morning dawned warm and clear in sharp contrast to the spirits of Doctor Grenville McAleer. That weary xenologist sat at coffee-and-doughnuts in the Two Way Grill, looking across the street to the neo-Hellenic entrance of the Hall of Assembly.

The ambassadors of fifteen planets were taking their places inside that hall, he knew—and one of them was accompanied by a purple cat with orange eyes and a lemon-colored tongue. Doctor McAleer groaned at the thought.

The door at the jukebox end of the grill opened and Rosalie entered. McAleer lifted his hat from the stool to his right and put it on his lap. Rosalie swung onto the vacated stool and loudly ordered three eggs, scrambled, with a double order of sausage.

This done she turned to McAleer. "How's stuff, Doc?"

"Haven't slept all night. Can't think of a thing. Eb is going to sit in that hall over there, spying on the thoughts of every delegate in the place. Nothing we can do." The doctor gazed despondently into the black depths of his coffee.

"You've unfolded a tale whose lightest

word should harrow my soul," Rosalie commented, spearing a sausage with her fork. "The whole deal is a hashish-eater's nightmare if you ask me."

Doctor McAleer looked up from his coffee into Rosalie's eyes. With a guffaw of enlightenment, the violence of which frightened an old gentleman at the end of the counter into spilling his coffee into his shirt pocket, Leery slapped Rosalie on the knee.

"Lordy, lady—that's it! Do you have any disreputable friends, dope-peddlers or the like?"

"Only you."

"Never mind the levity. C'm on. We can get the stuff from old Hugo at the EXTS pharmacy." Tossing a dollar bill beside his coffee cup McAleer grabbed Rosalie's arm and hurried her out of the Two Way Grill to the EXTS Building.

Thirteen minutes later Doctor McAleer and Rosalie were ensconced in front-row seats in the visitors' gallery of the Hall of Assembly. Directly below them, visible only as a pink scalp fringed with white hair, was Eb, the Dionysian ambassador. The ambassador's tomcat appeared as a purple blot on the floor near his master's desk.

The chairman of the Assembly rapped the gavel on his desk. "Gentlemen of fifty nations and fifteen worlds—we are met today to formulate a treaty of trade with Dionysius, a planetary nation here represented by His Excellency, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Eb. The chair will now hear suggestions from the floor concerning the provisions of such treaty."

"We'd better commence, Honey Chil'," McAleer whispered. He handed Rosalie a sloppily-wrapped cigarette and held a match to the twisted end as she lighted it. The girl inhaled the weedy-smelling smoke and leaned back in her chair.

"I'm beginning to feel gay already, Leery. What do I do?"

"Do you remember any of your Shakespeare?"

"I should—I was exposed to the guy for four years at Brigham Young University. Want to hear my Ophelia?

> "'They bore him barefaced on the bier:
> Sing hey non nonny, nonny hey nonny:
> And in his grave rain'd many a tear;
> Sing hey non nonny, hey nonny, hey non nonny . . .'"

Rosalie's voice broke as a high note of her song collided with a drunken giggle.

"That's great, Glamour Girl. Keep it up." Down on the floor Eb had arisen and was looking puzzledly toward the delegates on either side of him.

"I'm an outstanding witch too, Leery," Rosalie announced. "Listen—

> "'Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten
> Her nine farrow; grease that's sweaten
> From the murderer's gibbet throw
> Into the flame . . .'"

"Cute. Keep the Shakespeare flowing," McAleer ordered. "Don't say the words out loud, though. A couple of old ladies are sitting behind us and they seem to disapprove of your dramatic efforts."

"A pox upon them. I'm going to recite one of my favorite poems, 'A Broadside in Defense of Bundling,' published in seventeen eighty-six. 'Adam at first was formed of dust . . .'"

"Just *think* the poem, Sweetheart. Those two maiden aunts in the third row are pursing their lips like mad and giving you the cold-eye." Rosalie sat silent but she was grinning.

McAleer leaned over the railing to look at Eb—and saw to his delight that the Dionysian ambassador's scalp was red with anger and that the man was wriggling at his desk as though his chair had suddenly become quite hot. Glancing at Rosalie McAleer noticed that her cigarette had burned out and gave her a fresh one.

"I know the 'Radar Mates' Song,'" Rosalie giggled. "Can I sing it?"

"No! And I used to think you'd led a sheltered life!"

"I also know the poems of Herrick. Do you remember, 'Help me! Help me! Now I call . . . ?'"

"Quiet—you'll have us thrown out.

Just *think* the words." Doctor McAleer leaned out again to look at Eb. The Dionysian, who was evidently suffering agonies of anger, was taking out that anger on Rainbow.

The purple cat was sending up yowls of indignant protest as his master prodded him with his foot.

A UNIFORMED member of the EXTS Provost Marshal came running over to Eb's desk. He bowed to the ning over to Eb's desk.

He bowed to the Ambassador, grabbed up the loudly-crying Rainbow and hurried outside.

Eb sank low at his desk and drew a large handkerchief across his forehead. Then he stood to address the chairman.

"Mithter Chairman, my planet will be happy to obtain the thame trade treaty that prevailth between the other planeth of thith body. My demand for thpethial conthideration was ill-advithed. I move that thith meeting be adjourned and that the buthneth of formulating the new treaty be turned over to committee."

"We've won, Rosalie!" McAleer shouted to his companion. The girl was slumped in her chair and smiling. She gave no evidence of having heard him.

Rosalie looked up at Doctor McAleer and grinned.

"Have you heard, 'Ye Gods! The raptures . . .' "

McAleer interrupted, "No and I don't think I want to."

"It's by Anonymous," Rosalie pleaded.

"Come on. We've got to get some coffee into your stomach." McAleer slid his shoulder beneath Rosalie's arm and half-carried her to the stairwell. As he passed the third row of the gallery the two old ladies who had been observing Rosalie drew back, expressions of horrified disapproval on their faces. McAleer halted, bowed as best he could and treated the beldames with several ringing phrases of his best Venerian blasphemy. Then he carried Rosalie downstairs.

Back in the laboratory Doctor McAleer soon had coffee bubbling in a percolator he had improvised from a Florence flask and a retort. He poured half a pint of the black fluid into an evaporating dish and handed it to Rosalie. She drank it with the detachment of a sleepwalker.

Somewhere between her fourth and seventh evaporating-dishful of coffee Rosalie began to recover from her drugged delirium. McAleer sat beside her atop his desk, supporting her head as she poured the hot coffee down her throat.

"You were wonderful, Kid," he said. "Only one thing I regret—that I couldn't let you finish 'The Radar Mates' Song.' "

Rosalie shook her head and groaned. "Oh, Leery—was I reciting that sort of poetry?"

"That and several others, including some apocryphal Shakespeare. No matter. We were right about Rainbow. That colorful tomcat was picking up your thoughts, amplifying them and rebroadcasting them to Eb. That's what that huge *medulla oblongata* of the species is for, I guess.

"As you doubtless suspect your telepathic wattage was stepped up by the marijuana you smoked, acting in synergy with the other drug I injected into your blood stream. So your thoughts were the most powerful in the whole hall. All that Rainbow could receive was 'A Broadside in Defense of Bundling.' No wonder Eb was mad!"

"Leery, you deliberately made a dope-fiend of me."

"That stuff's not habit-forming, Honey," the doctor remonstrated.

"You still broke the Interplanetary Narcotics Law. Quite a penalty attached to that. What are you going to do about it?"

"Blackmailer! Well, I've got an old class ring that you might be able to fit onto your thumb. And while we're waiting for the Civil License Bureau to open how's about telling me how that 'Ye Gods!' poem goes?"

By MATT LEE

Barbara Fell's eyes were cool and amused

I DO NOT LIKE THEE . . .

Not everyone, like Malcolm Lane, will go to sleep today, and learn the one sure way of surviving—until tomorrow!

LET'S go home, honey. It's almost two o'clock and you've got to be in the office tomorrow—today."

There was a trace of the querulous in Joanna's usually velvet voice. And while her coral-tinted fingernails were resting lightly against the sleeve of his jacket it seemed to Malcolm as if they were digging through the fabric into his flesh—digging, demanding, dragging him toward the one thing he wished to avoid.

He shook off the illusion, looked around, even managed a smile at Joanna, who was looking up at him with a faint shadow of anxiety marring the smooth surface of her brow.

"I suppose we might as well," he told her—and in truth the party was breaking up. Great spaces of the studio room

were revealing the havoc of unemptied plates, sticky glasses and massed cigarette butts which people and smoke and chatter had so recently concealed.

Malcolm sent one involuntary glance toward the big window seat where Barbara Fell was reclining, tawnily, gracefully, still surrounded by a group of clustering males. Her pale eyes were ignoring them as they met his full-on.

He turned quickly back to Joanna. Strangely at that moment Barbara Fell reminded him of Circe. Her attendants lacked only snouts and bristles to make the illusion perfect. He was not, he determined, going to be one of them. Yet the draw was there, pulling him.

Outside were the city and the night—and of course Joanna. They walked slowly toward the corner apartment building where Joanna had her home. Their feet made loud sharp sounds on the sidewalk.

"Is it that Dr. Fell?" Joanna asked him suddenly, shattering the unreality of the moment. "Is she—do you like her?"

"I'm damned if I know," he replied honestly. "She's got something—but it's odd. She repels even while she attracts."

"She's a lot like you in some ways," said Joanna unexpectedly. Then, confused, "I don't mean that you're . . ."

"Just call me Old Repellent," said Malcolm. He put an arm across her shoulders and pulled her close to him. She shivered briefly, then was soft and warm. Like a kitten, he thought, a kitten that will never grow up into—into a cat. Barbara Fell, he realized, was all cat and all that cat means.

"I didn't mean that, honey," said Joanna. Suddenly she was facing him, holding him close and her mouth was soft as a peony bud and sweet with the raspberry flavor of her lipstick.

"I know you didn't mean it, Jo," he told her. "Don't worry, it's you—it has to be you."

"You've been so different lately," she said, her arms massaging his back almost fiercely. "You never used to like parties, Mal. What's happened to you?"

"I dunno, Jo," he said honestly. "Just restless, I guess. Can I come up for a bit?"

"It's too late," Joanna whispered, her face all but buried against his chest. Then, looking up, "You know how strict they are here about things like that?"

"Gross immorality," he replied. "How about letting me break your lease? Then you'd have to marry me."

"Soon, honey," she said softly. "Soon—real soon."

SHE left him then and they walked, sedately apart from one another, around the corner. He left her under the marquee, lifted an arm in salute to the doorman and walked on to his own apartment in the next block. Within himself he knew—though he could not have told you how—that she had lost him.

She had left him alone—even though he could not tell her how great was his need just then. He went on to the terror that lay minutes ahead.

He lay on his bed and tried to stay awake—for it was sleep that he feared. He tried to visualize Joanna, but even though she had been with him so recently her face became the face of this or that girl he had long since drifted or broken away from. Finally, clear as carved amber, it became that of Barbara Fell, her eyes amused and cool on his, her mouth curved in a Giaconda half-smile of hidden sardonic affection.

In desperation he began to visualize an army of toy soldiers he had had as a child—and whose every member, whole or broken, he could distinctly recall. They were of British manufacture and incredible accuracy. He lined them up in parade array, horse foot and guns—then in battle array over a terrain known to him from infancy and all through his growing up.

He knew it meant betrayal but anything was better than that sardonic knowing smile. The colors of the stiff little toys became more and more vivid

and then at last they began to move.

As always, when they moved of themselves, he was asleep.

Then suddenly he was no longer lying in bed. He was no longer in his apartment. He was no longer in New York. He was in a city he had never consciously visited—but it was real and it was night still and he knew its every turn and building and corner. It was Minneapolis and though the air was cold it did not bother him.

He knew he was still clad in pajamas and that scattered passersby were regarding him oddly—but somehow he was unaffected by embarrassment, filled only with a terrible urgency. Beyond the buildings that blocked off the view he could see the glow of the fire and knew he must get there, get there instantly.

Then, inexplicably, he *was* there, moving through a smoke-filled corridor of the blazing hotel. A fat middle-aged woman, her curl papers ablaze in a turban of fire, ran screaming past him but his concern was not for her. He had to reach the closed door at the hallway's end, get through it, get the man lying there—he knew it was a man—out and to safety.

He was through the door. Though the limp half-asphyxiated figure on the bed was that of a large young man Malcolm lifted him as if it were weightless. The window was a rectangle of fire but he plunged through it with his burden, directing his leap to land cleanly in the net the firemen were holding under a window fifty feet to his left.

He knew he did not need the net, knew at the same time that it was necessary discretion to use it. He landed feet first, still carrying his human burden, on his feet as if the "net" were a trampoline. From it he bounced again, somersaulted and landed lightly on his feet on the sidewalk. He handed his burden to a slack-jawed pop-eyed pair of white-coated firemen.

Then, with a sense of vast relief and accomplishment, he was back in his bed —and with that knowledge, knowledge ceased.

He awoke, feeling unexpectedly rested—but then his dream had been unexpectedly brief. He regarded himself somberly in the mirror as he shaved, wondering again at the strange illusion of reality which clung to his nightmare.

It was the fourth such incident in his sleep. They did not come every night, of course—he could sense within himself when they were imminent and it was on such occasions that he sought to postpone slumber.

Dreams, he thought—who was afraid of dreams? But he knew he was kidding himself. The first time had not been so bad despite its bizarreness. Not that it hadn't made his skin crawl at first. It had come—he jumped a little with realization and all but cut a slice in his chin. It had come after the second time he and Joanna had met Barbara Fell at some party or other.

HE THOUGHT, "I do not like thee, Dr. Fell . . ." and then he thought back to that first dream—which had seemed so unlike a dream. He wondered if he were actually going crazy.

Although it was dark in New York he had found himself in the bright early morning of Frankfurt, Germany. He didn't know how he had known it was Frankfurt—he just knew.

He had been standing, still in pajamas, inside the tiger house of the Frankfurt zoo—standing there, most of him unafraid, enjoying the beauty of the great cats as they stirred restlessly, waiting for their morning meal.

He *knew* the cats knew he was there, knew at the same time that they could not and would not harm him. He had felt the yearning affection of one of them—an immense king-sized tiger—had extended a friendly hand to caress the thick softness of the white fur upon its throat.

Then, of course, a pair of keepers had come running toward the cage, shouting imprecations at him in German. He

had given the great cat a final farewell caress, had returned to his bed.

FOUR nights later he had had the second "dream." This time he had found himself following a woman along the mosaic sidewalk of the Copacabana of Rio de Janeiro. It had been important —terribly important—that he catch her, talk to her, tell her—what?

Sun-helmeted policemen had come running out of the night at her scream, had seized his arms and blown their whistles—and he had simply returned to his bed, sweating in his embarrassment and from the heat of the tropical night. For he had been wearing pajamas again.

His third "dream" the following week had really brought the terror. In it he had been standing on the uneven floor of a shack deep in the marshy districts outside of Venice, California. With him had been a murderer and the man the slayer was about to kill.

He had remonstrated with the slayer, for some reason knowing that he must not use physical restraint. The man had laughed at him evilly, then fired four bullets into the groveling wretch in the corner. With which Malcolm had broken the killer's neck like a match-stick and left the two bodies lying there.

Three days afterward, on impulse, he had bought a Los Angles paper of the day following his dream"—and read of the Venice double slaying and the mystery of the killer's killer. That had made the terror real.

A tiger, a woman, a murderer, a man in a blazing hotel—he tried to find some connection between them. For there *was* a connection, a thread that danced ever just beyond the grasp of his thoughts.

He wondered if this was how it felt to go mad.

The idea of remaining alone in his apartment was repellent just then so he rode down prosaically in the elevator, discussing the fate of the Dodgers in yesterday's double header, with Joe, the liftman. Surely he was being rational enough.

The smells and sounds of the restaurant on the ground floor of the building were reassuringly normal, as was Mae, the silver-peroxide waitress, who took his order. "Tell the chef not to crisp the bacon too much," he said with a smile.

"I'll stand over him myself with a skillet," said Mae. Then she was off with a flirt of brief white skirt and he looked at the paper he had bought at the magazine stand and wondered if he dared to open it up. If it said anything about. . . .

He conquered his fears and forced himself to look through it carefully. When he finished scanning the last page and saw no mention of any fire in a hotel in Minneapolis his relief was so great that he all but spilled his orange juice.

"I've been conning myself into this," he thought.

"What's that, Mr. Lane?" Mae was looking at him with concern in her pale blue eyes as she prepared to put his plate of eggs and bacon on the tablecloth before him.

"Nothing, Mae." He grinned so warmly at her that she smiled in return. "I guess I was just thinking out loud."

He felt good all morning at the office —so much so that he was able to tackle a rather messy deal which had been hanging fire for more than three months and tie up all the loose ends in a mere hour and a half on the telephone. His boss, on receipt of the news, told him to take the rest of the day off.

He called Joanna and made a date for lunch with her at one of the Lower Fifth Avenue sidewalk cafés. In his present mood he could not understand why he had felt earlier that morning that she had failed him beyond recall.

"Wear your go-to-meetin' clothes, baby," he told her affectionately. "Maybe we can make a matinée."

"What happened, honey?" she in-

quired, pleased. "Did you strike radium or something since last night?"

"Something like that," he replied. "See you in an hour."

Joanna was late, of course—she invariably was. But at the moment he didn't mind. The day was bright and lazily warm beyond the shadow of the awning beneath which he sat and sipped lazily at a planter's punch. He watched the people and cars and buses move past beyond the row of hedge-boxes separating cafe from sidewalk in ever-changing panorama and reflected that, in Joanna's case, the results were worth the time she spent achieving them.

He sent a busboy for an evening paper, knowing he had at least half an hour to go before she appeared. Idly he glanced at the front page—and then the heavy black headline smote him between the eyes. It read:

SUPERMAN SAVES SLEEPING GUEST IN MINNEAPOLIS HOTEL HOLOCAUST

There it was—in black and white. The sunlight exchanged its mellow warmth for a brassy glare and his forehead and palms were suddenly alive with sweat. Evidently it had happened too late to make the New York morning gazettes.

The story was fragmentary but explicit. A tall young man in pajamas had made a spectacular leap through a fiery window, carrying a half-asphyxiated man in his arms, had then somersaulted out of the net to safety for both of them—and vanished.

There were confused reports by certain Minneapolis residents of having seen such a man moments before, strolling along a street in pajamas—when he had also vanished. Authorities were citing everything up to and including flying discmen but no one had the answer. Pictures, it said, headed the second section.

HE was still sitting there, frozen, studying the newsprint reproduction of himself in the course of completing his somersault to the sidewalk while still holding his rescuee, when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He jumped inches, sighed with relief as he saw that it was Joanna. She was regarding him with puzzlement.

"Honey," she said, "is there anything wrong?"

He rose, saw that she was properly seated across from him, turned the paper around and showed it to her. She looked at it, then at him, said, "Why, Malcolm, it looks something like you."

"That's it," he replied simply. "It is—it was me—or I."

"But, honey," she protested, "that's silly. You couldn't have been in Minneapolis last night. Why, it was after two o'clock when you took me home from the party."

He tried to explain the inexplicable but was unable to pierce the literal limitations of Joanna's mind. Finally she put down her napkin and stood up. She was quietly angry.

"Malcolm Lane," she said as sternly as if he were some hooky-playing schoolboy and she his teacher, "I don't know what's come over you lately. You used to have the nicest, most even disposition of anyone I ever met. But lately you're all up and down and I never know what you're going to be like. I think you're crazy."

"It's not funny," said Malcolm. He tried once more to reach her. "Joanna, when I asked if I could come up last night it was because I was afraid to sleep. I can—well, sort of feel these things coming on. I'm telling you, Joanna, that these 'dreams' are real."

"It's that Dr. Fell," said Joanna, wrinkling her nose with disapproval. "You only get this way after you've seen her. I declare, she's got you hypnotized. I'm leaving, Malcolm, until you come to your senses. If you prefer a red-headed evil-eyed—"

"She's not exactly a red-head," said Malcolm. Then he grinned his apology and added, "Joanna, I'm not trying to make trouble. I'm asking for help from

a girl who has said she loved me."

"I'm sure I don't know how to help you in this," Joanna told him distantly. "You need a mind doctor—a psychoanalist or something. Why don't you see your Dr. Fell? She's one."

"Is she?" said Bill, surprised. He hadn't known. "Perhaps I will at that. Thanks, Joanna." But this last was said to the girl's stiff back as she walked away from him between the tables.

Barbara Fell proved surprisingly easy to see—nor did she seem at all surprised that he should want to see her. "Professionally, Barbara," he told her. She seemed even prepared for that.

"Of course, Malcolm," she told him. "I just saw your picture in the paper. You look very daring indeed."

It was there, the underlying mockery. Bill winced, mopped his streaming brow in the confines of the telephone booth, said, "I really think I'm going crazy. I'm coming up."

"It's difficult," she replied and the mockery was gone. "But you're not going crazy!" This emphatically, then, "Come on up."

The mocking smile was on her lips as she caught him looking around her office. She said, "I don't keep my couch in here, Malcolm. And in your case I don't think we'll need it. Sit down."

He did so, wondering why this almost brassily self-assured young woman should be so attractive to him. She had looks in a semi-exotic burnished way—looks and the flowing sinuosity of a belly dancer—but he had been sufficiently attractive to enough women for enough years not to be deceived merely by the shell of beauty.

Conventionally she was not as beautiful as Joanna. But something lurked beneath, something that had scared him from the first even while it fascinated him—or so he felt now.

He told her his story as fully as he could, the while she sat behind her desk and listened, toying with a pencil that gleamed golden in the early-afternoon brightness. never taking notes. When he had finished she regarded him somberly, although he fancied he saw a gleam of something behind the barrier of her lashes—a gleam of something very like triumph.

The silence stretched on and fear stirred within him—fear and realization. He blurted, "You *know*—don't you?"

"Yes," she said quietly and her voice had the deep thrum of some hidden dynamo, almost a purr. "Yes, Malcolm, I know."

"Then stop it," he pleaded. "It's wrecking my life."

"Perhaps," she replied ambiguously. Then, "We'll have to employ hypnotism, I'm afraid. Would you mind?"

"Very much," he countered. "I have no desire to run around flapping my arms and cackling like a chicken."

"Charlatanery!" She dismissed it contemptuously. The gold pencil moved slowly, rhythmically while she seemed to search for further words. His eyes followed it. . . .

* * * * *

"Very well," she told him. "If you won't you won't." Her oddly light eyes were steady on his. "Remember, Malcolm, come back if you have a recurrence. I am very deeply interested." This too was ambiguous but there was no doubting its sincerity.

He left and went downtown to a bar a few blocks from his apartment and proceeded to try to get drunk. But whiskey tasted like kerosene and he gave it up. He ate an early dinner alone and went to a double feature. He walked the streets for a bit in the darkness, feeling lonelier than ever before in his memory.

FINALLY, of course, he went home and to bed—even though he knew it was a mistake. But a man can fight only so long. This time reality engulfed him so rapidly it almost seemed that he was not yet even asleep. It was sudden, frightening—inexplicable.

He was at a party this time—a party somewhere where the night was warm and young and Japanese lanterns danced and glowed in the palms trees about a great court with a pool in its center. He sensed that it was somewhere high above the harbor of Acapulco on the western coast of Mexico.

A girl—a tall beautiful brunette with a body guaranteed to bring a Trappist monk racing out of his cell—put a bare arm through his pajama-clad one and looked up into his face and laughed, displaying an array of magnificent white teeth.

There were others around them—an amazing gathering. There were Chinese, Negroes, East Indians, Scandinavians, Latins, Americans, Mongols—all tall, all sinuous, all seemingly glorying in a sense of camaraderie that set them apart from the rest of the world. Yet it was more than camaraderie.

Once or twice, through the shifting pattern of motley, he caught sight of a person who looked as lost, as bewildered, as he felt. One was a man wearing a turban, robe and sandals, whose black brows scowled fiercely as he stared about him. The other was a girl, petal young, who was vainly seeking to cover her nudity with a bath towel.

"Your first party?" the brunette beauty asked. Then, peering up at him and laughing, "But of course." She spoke English with an accent. "You should be gay, not frightened," she added.

"Let's say I'm more bewildered than either," he replied in Mexican, which he correctly judged to be her language. She smiled acknowledgement of his linguistic courtesy.

"Perhaps we can add to your bewilderment," she said with a seductively mischievous grin. Suddenly he was in her arms and she was pressing a full soft very-alive mouth against his.

"Cut!" snapped a dry familiar voice. He released the senorita and turned to see Barbara Fell standing beside them. She said, "Really, Lupe, you can't have them all—at least not this one."

"Nooo?" the Mexican girl inquired. Suddenly there was an explosion as she swept fingernails across Barbara Fell's face. The doctor replied efficiently with a kick on the shins and a sharp backhand slap that sent the brunette reeling back. Then . . .

* * * * *

Malcolm woke up in his own bed. He picked up his telephone and dialed Dr. Fell's number. "Coming over," he said.

She was holding cotton to the scratches on her face, still clad in party dress. "I thought you'd be calling when you—left," she told him. "So I came on back. Damn that little hellcat Lupe."

"All right," said Malcolm, "what's it all about?"

"Have a cigarette while I finish fixing my face," said Barbara. "Have a drink." Nodding toward a decanter. "I guarantee it won't taste like kerosene."

"You devil!" said Malcolm, regarding her somberly. "You hypnotized me this afternoon."

"As I have since our second meeting," she replied coolly, still holding cotton to her cheek. "As soon as I was sure . . ."

"Sure of what?" Malcolm asked. He recalled how Joanna had said Barbara seemed to have him hypnotized, then and more frighteningly he remembered certain imaginative stories he had read of human mutations. He asked, "Barbara, am I—are we mutants?"

"Hardly!" She laughed. "At least hardly in any evolutionary sense. Actually we are reversions in the full sense of the word."

"Tell me," he replied. "Am I always going to be—well, it sounds corny but am I always going to be under your power?"

"Not when you've wakened within the dream," she told him. Then your real purpose and being will be with you always."

"All right," he said, "I'm ready.

Let's have it."

She regarded him thoughtfully, accepted the drink he offered her, drained it. Her cheek had ceased to bleed. "You know how the vanished strain of the palomino—the golden horse of the Conquistadores—was brought back through careful breeding after it had become extinct?"

"I have read about it, of course," he told her, wondering.

"In a sense you and I are palominos," she told him. "Early in the nineteenth century—before Iron Curtains and other man-made foolishnesses made nationals of men of science—certain of the world's great minds got together about the matter of what has since been called 'wild talents.'

"Oddly enough it was a Chinese philosopher who gave birth to the concept that at some time in the distant past our Earth had been to some extent colonized by a race from outer space—a race of humanoids of superior psychic power whose tragedy was their ability to interbreed. He cited a number of instances, from the sporadic manner of the taming of the cat to certain rare but recurring physical types."

"But what could they do?" Malcolm asked, fascinated. "This was before Gregor Mendel and his law."

"Do you think Mendel developed his laws of reproduction without having someone suggest it to him?" she asked, then shook her head. "No, Malcolm, there was a leak. But to carry on with my story similar talents and indications of superior non-general physical traits were noted in all countries included in the experiment."

SHE paused, put down the cotton, said, "To make it brief, for a century and a half now—five generations traditionally although in this case it is seven—the experiment has been proceeding. And it is beginning to have definite results—as you know."

"But this—this nocturnal teleportation," he said. "What is it and why and how can we do it?"

"It is one of the powers of those from whom we come," said Barbara gravely. "Our folk did not arrive on Earth in anything as clumsy as a space-ship. They just—came."

"Will I be able to do it while I'm awake?" he asked her.

"Once I have treated you," she told him. "At the party you visited tonight those present came from all over the world. Yet all will be home instantly once the party is over."

"Tell me," he said, "why my dreams have been so odd? Why in my first was I in the tiger cage in Frankfurt? Why did I pursue the woman in Rio? Why didn't I prevent the killer from slaying his victim? Why did I rescue that man from the fire, Barbara?"

"Curiously enough they do make sense," said Dr. Fell with her odd half-smile—which was no longer sardonic to Malcolm. "Naturally, after noting your physical indications at our first meeting and checking on your ancestry to be sure, it was I who gave your true being hypnotic release.

"It is quite usual for us to dream of cats on our first teleportations, Malcolm. We brought the cat to Earth with us—not the clumsy sabertooth, which was already extinct when we came. For some reason that tiger in Frankfurt seems to sense us better. Perhaps he too is an atatvism. And it is our nature, before attaining control, ever to seek our own kind."

"And pure animal charm is the most easily sensed," said Malcolm. Barbara nodded and smiled at him and rubbed her face.

"You are perceptive—which is as it should be," she told him. "In your second journey you were drawn naturally enough to a woman as unawakened as yourself. She too was frightened and sought to have you arrested. In the third you were drawn by emotional violence—alas, a failing of our species." She smiled ruefully as she fingered the now-clotted lines of blood on her face.

"Implanted in us from beyond Earth is the command that we never needlessly hurt our less favored fellows. Unfortunately, in such a case as ours, not all the breed is pure. You had no right to interefere with the killer's whim toward an *Earthling—but when he killed* you had to punish. You did and rightly so. I was pleased.

"You knew—at the time?" He was incredulous.

"Naturally, Malcolm. You have been nurtured carefully—as your experience tonight should tell you." The mockery was back in her half-smile. "And last night you were drawn by the need of a fellow in mortal peril. You saved his life."

"One thing I don't understand," he said, then stopped and rubbed his nose ruefully. "Rather, one of many. Am I really so much stronger when I am in this—this other state of existence?"

"Not really," she told him. "There is no magic transformation. You merely have full possession of all your powers —mental and physical—and complete ability to focus and direct them." She paused, added, "Do you wish to make it a permanent condition?"

"*You* have, haven't you?" he asked, even though he knew the answer. For the first time he understood her. She was no Circe—she was merely walking through her paces, a good actress whose heart and interests were actually elsewhere.

"Of course," she replied. "Want me to break your arm?"

"Not tonight, Josephine," he told her and they both laughed at the absurdity. "Are there other things I should know about it?"

"Many—but you'll learn them for yourself. You will, for one thing, age far more slowly since your mind and body will not be continually at conflict with themselves and one another. This also is a tremendous factor in ensuring good health. Oh—there are many wonderful things in being one of us."

"How do you call yourselves?" Malcolm asked Barbara Fell.

"The Eones," she replied. "The dawn folk—though actually, of course, mankind—brute that he was—was already in existence."

"And tell me," he said, "if you can, *why you are so urgently seeking others* of your sort? I gather the original program was of a loose nature to put it mildly."

"If that is a joke it's in very bad taste," she said. Then, smiling at his gesture of demurrance, "We are in desperate haste. If we do not soon escape we may never rejoin our kind."

"It's that bad, eh?" he said thoughtfully. She nodded somberly and he said, "Can't you do something to stop it?"

"We've tried—heaven knows we've tried," she told him. "But the world just now reminds me of that old story of the parrot on the ship who watched the magician, piqued at the lack of applause his tricks received, blow up the ship and everyone on it to prove his ability. Only the parrot survived, rocking on the ocean in its cage and nodding and saying, 'Mighty clever, *mighty* clever.' "

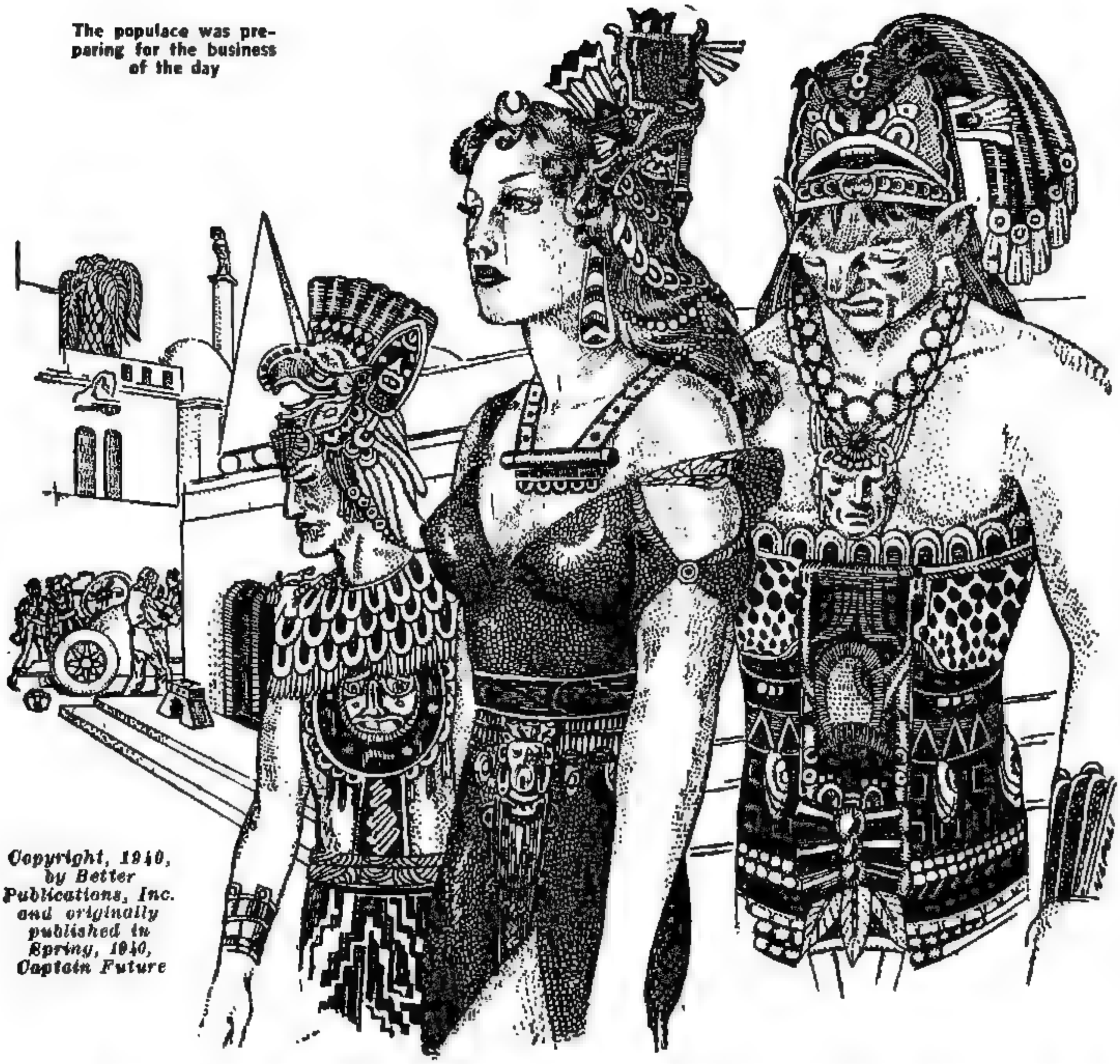
"That's the world today," said Malcolm. "Where are we going?"

"I shouldn't tell you until you are fully one of us," Barbara replied. "But we are going to a planet of a star in Orion. Many of us have traveled, seeking a fitting new home. Some have perished in the fires of Mercury or the frozen methane of the moons of Jupiter."

"It seems incredible to think of traveling such distances—just like that." He snapped his fingers. Then he looked at Barbara searchingly and long in the light of his new understanding. He laid gentle fingers along her scratched cheek and said, "Is it going to be very lonely, Barbara?"

She smiled and all at once her smile was soft and shadowy-sweet. She said gently, "I don't think so, darling. Not any more."

"Very well," he told her. "Let's go."



The populace was preparing for the business of the day

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MEN OF HONOR

By WILL GARTH

INSIDE the steel-hulled craft, Red Carson flicked a rocket control. The *Wanderer's* speed through space braked to six thousand miles an hour. Beside him, slender, dark-visaged Emil Dent looked thoughtfully through the meteor-proof window. Dent turned away after a while, bent over a sheaf of astro-maps.

"Planet two hours ahead," Dent said to his companion.

"Charted?" big Red Carson asked.

"Yep, charted—but not explored," Dent

A Space-Ship Crew Sights a City of Gleaming Gold!

said. "Slow down to cruising speed."

Carson blasted a row of nose-jets. The ship slowed to coasting velocity. Both men stared through the observation port-holes as night-side of the unexplored planet came into view.

"This is a big one," Dent exclaimed. "Almost as large as Earth!"

Carson reached for the electro-telescope. "Wonder if this planet is inhabited?" The red-headed spaceman adjusted the dials of the telescope. The large planet blossomed swiftly into focus. Eagerly, the two men studied the image-screen. High lighted mountain ranges, black oceans, shadowy deserts, stood out in minute detail.

"Nothing here," Carson said flatly. "It looks barren. Let's try the day-side."

The *Wanderer* sped ahead, half-circled the planet. Presently the topography of the day-side flashed on the image-screen. Rivers, forests, jungles, rushed by kaleidoscopically.

Then the two men saw it—The Golden City!

Carson gaped at the image-screen.

"It can't be," Dent whispered hoarsely. "A city of gold!"

"It's not real gold," Carson replied. "It's probably brass!"

Carson slowed the ship, and both men studied the image-screen carefully. On its surface, a majestic golden city gleamed in the light of a binary sun with indescribable radiance. Towering minarets rose above the city. The whole city was cradled in a valley. On both sides were mountains.

"If we'd have been going half a G faster, we'd have missed it!" Dent said.

But Carson was not listening. Trembling with excitement, he was already preparing the spectroscope. In another minute he would know whether those buildings were gold or not!

"It's gold, all right," he shouted suddenly. "A whole city of it. We'd be chumps if we didn't fill the ship with it!"

THE golden spires and buildings meant a civilization far superior to that of the Earthmen. The people of the Golden City would certainly defend their precious possessions.

There was only one safe way to get that gold—steal it. They would land on the night-side, glide across the planet to the rim of the valley. Then they would descend and grab all the gold they could.

Furtively, the *Wanderer* landed near the Golden City. As the two men slunk across the cultivated fields, they had to hide in tall grain until the agricultural workers passed by, carrying strange cutting implements that looked more like saws than scythes.

"Some civilization here!" Dent said admiringly. The very sidewalks and thoroughfares were paved with gold—gold, used as generously as bricks on Earth!

"I wish we could take this whole sidewalk with us," Carson said wistfully. "We could spend the rest of our lives vacationing on Eros."

"Or that wall there," Dent added in awe, pointing to the solid-gold front of a magnificent house. "That place must belong to some big shot here. See the diamonds all over the joint?"

"Where's everybody?" Carson asked.

"Must be sleeping," Dent said softly. "Say, we've got to work fast. What'll we take?"

The two men dashed greedily about the city. Dent wanted to settle for a golden statue. Carson held out for the wall of a clothing store. He had his Silo-gun drawn ready to atom-blast the golden wall when Dent clutched his arm.

"How are we going to carry it if you do get it?"

"It's simple," Carson said quickly. "We'll pack all the gold we can get into this golden car and wheel it to the ship. Then we'll take off before they wake up here. And it's Eros for us!"

Dent nodded. "Right, pal. But let's hurry up. Dawn's breaking."

Carson trained the muzzle at the golden wall of the store. He worked carefully and silently, cutting along the edges of the wall as though prying open a sardine can. Meanwhile, Dent walked through the streets, collecting golden ashcans, pitchers, signposts. Much as the movable objects tempted him, the solidly set jewels tempted him even more.

The two Earthmen were like schoolboys stranded on a desert island with barrels of

ice-cream and cases of candy. They didn't know what to take first.

Carson was working on the last few feet of the wall when Dent returned. He was just in time, for the city was coming to life. All around them they could hear the noise and bustle of a populace getting ready for the business of the day. Dent even fancied he could hear a golden alarm clock ringing.

Dent and Carson had no sooner lifted the segmented wall into their golden car and sneaked into a side street when a group of the city's inhabitants passed by. They weren't very strange-looking. High-browed, olive-skinned, they reminded Carson of Earth's age-old race, the Aztecs. They wore loose-fitting, silklike robes.

"Come on, let's go!" Dent said. "If we stay here they'll catch us."

Arduoúsly, but happily, the two men pulled their golden cargo. They found a road at the outskirts of the city that led in the direction of their ship.

"Did you notice that group that passed us wasn't talking?" Dent said "Telepathy, I bet!"

An hour later, the two men were in sight of their space craft.

"Hurry up," Carson said, gleefully. "We'll be away from here in ten minutes."

The men approached the *Wanderer*. Suddenly their eyes dilated in horror. Something was wrong, fearfully wrong!

The *Wanderer* —had wandered! The engines, the control room, the observatory were completely exposed. The steel hull of the ship had vanished!

NO, NOT vanished. For to their right the two Earthmen saw the hull of their ship. It was neatly cut up into squares, piled a dozen feet high. Busily engaged weighing the steel hull was the group of inhabitants who had passed them on their way to the city.

"They've ruined our ship!" yelled Carson. "They've stolen the steel hull! What do they want with steel, the least expensive metal in the ship! We'll never be able to return to Earth!"

The olive-skinned inhabitants gazed silently at the two explorers.

"Men from the faraway world," a thought beat at their consciousness. "This metal, steel, may be worthless to you. But"—the foremost pointed at the cart loaded with gold and jewels—"the metal you seem so anxious to possess is as valueless to us as steel is to you. Steel, you see, is our medium of exchange, because of its rarity."

"But you've stolen our ship!" Dent shouted in outrage.

The leader of the natives pointed silently to a mountainous heap of glistening yellow metal and gleaming gems.

"We have not stolen your ship," the mental voice denied. "We are men of honor. In return for the steel we have taken, we are giving you this pile of gold and jewels—weight for weight."

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I had no chair to stand on, so could only punch his prominent middle

Too Dense to Die

By DAVE DRYFOOS

Wizard Bye finds out it takes a cook, not genius nor hard work, to open the floodgates of success for an inventor!

ACHIEVEMENT? It's a matter of insides, my boy. The secret of success lies in every man's digestion. Just follow the ideas you get on nights of colicky sleeplessness and you'll become as wealthy as me. There's many a time when the human mind's nothing but a gas-engine.

It was heart-burn made me think up my Cybernetic Cooker. And out of that grew my Two-Way Space Pump, the basis of my fabulous tool-bit business. All the world knows our slogan—*Buy Bye's Bits—Bye-Bye Bumps.*

Like Henry Ford, that legendary figure of ancient industrial history, I was already midde-aged when I started toward success. I was rooming and boarding with Carrie Coles, the lady I've since married.

The Cybernetic Cooker idea, when it came, was a big one and I needed space

to work it out. So one night, after the other boarder had moved away, taking his 'gyro from the basement hangar, I went into the kitchen to see if Carrie'd let me have a shop downstairs.

Well, you know how women are. She wanted to be coaxed.

"Need my hangar-space, do you," she said, putting down the egg, tomato, cheese, olive, bacon and onion sandwich she was nibbling to keep her strength up till morning. "Well, you think too much, Wizard Bye. What are you going to invent this time—invisible light?"

"Invisible light's already been invented," I told her. "You can see it lots of places. I'm designing a mechanical brain. That's Cybernetics—an old-fashioned development of machines that think faster than men can."

"Why make a machine to think faster than men?" she scoffed. "There's no shortage of women. Besides, it won't work. Any machine that thinks like men will wear itself out thinking up ways to avoid thinking."

"You just don't understand the creative process," I said.

"No?" she came back. "Have I forgotten the artificial rubber you strengthened until the Board of Health insisted it smelled strong enough? Or the silent boiler-riveting machine the police took away? Or the drain-cleaning compound that stopped all the sewers? Or—"

I BROKE in with my new idea. "Carrie," I said excitedly, "this new invention's all for you! Hitched to your electronic stove and refrigerator the mechanical brain will become a Cybernetic Cooker, able to plan and prepare all your meals.

"It'll free you from drudgery. You'll only have to order a few groceries, put them in a hopper, turn the dial to breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, bite, snack, refreshment or melba-toast, depending on the time of day, and out will come just what you need to sustain you, unthought-of by human brain."

The little lady raised her two hundred pounds of pleasing plumpness to the dainty feet she hadn't seen in twenty years. "If you think you're going to ruin my stove and ice-box," she warned, shaking a finger like a delicate pink banana, "you do need a thinking machine!

"And what's wrong with my cooking, I'd like to know? After the way I work and slave over a hot stove, boiling your milk and barely taking time to fix the few things I eat all day—"

"That's just the point, Carrie," I interrupted. "I can't bear to see you work so hard. Besides, you'll go down in history as the first woman ever to do Cybernetic Cooking—the neighbors'll stand on their heads in envy!"

"Hm," she said, thoughtfully. "At that, I guess you can play in the hangar till it's rented, Wiz. Of course, I'll never actually use your hootnanny but another gadget might look nice by the sink if it was to be enameled in white and trimmed in chrome."

Well, sir, after that warning, you can be sure I was careful of the Cybernetic Cooker's appearance. I followed the latest theories of interior decorating—designed my machine to harmonize with Carrie's personal style of beauty. It was as wide as the whole hangar.

But you know how women are. When I brought Carrie down to look at the finished masterwork she first flicked off invisible dust to establish title. Then she asked, "How in the world do you expect to get that tremendous contraption out of this basement and fit it into my crowded kichen?"

Well, I couldn't answer right away because that happened to be one of the details I hadn't got around to. But the Cybernetic Cooker itself could easily have solved the problem if she'd only given me a chance to translate her question into binary arithmetic and put it to the mechanical brain.

I didn't get time though. The very next night, just after I'd excused myself from the dinner table—she had eaten a

cod-fish pizza with soy sauce—and had gone to my room for a little bicarb, in clumped this red-haired stranger, Herc Hardhart, bringing a load of trouble on the broken-down dump-plane he parked just over my window.

He was about six-feet-six and weighed three hundred twenty pounds in his sheer nylon sox. Had a nose for nourishment too—went straight from the front door to the dining room, though he had never seen the place before. That showed how rude he was but from the tone of Carrie's voice as he scraped with his fork I knew she had found a boarder of her own kidney. I couldn't stomach him.

I knew he'd want the hangar where my Cybernetic Cooker was, so while he munched I stood in my room on pins and needles, with an ear glued to the door's panel and my eyes riveted to its crack. Naturally that was one of the most painful periods of my life.

The red-haired human tape-worm was eating his way right under Carrie's skin. "I do like to see a man take his food," she kept simpering. "Maybe that's why I'm still a lonely widow. My present boarder is a skinny little runt with the appetite of a sick canary, though he ate normally when he first came here.

"But you remind me of Rudy Coles, my fourth husband. There was a man now. Every night he used to eat a pound of raw hamburger with six fried eggs on top. Then he'd visit the corner tavern to see his friends and wash down a few pig's-trotters and pretzels and pickles and olives and cheese and crackers and anchovies and onions with a little beer.

"After that, his friends would send him home with a police escort. Why, even the autopsy surgeon admired him—said he had a cute digestion. Have some more of my nice jellied leeks, Mr. Hardhart."

I knew he'd taken some by his burp. When the windows stopped rattling he said, "Madam, you are a genuine geographic genius of the gastronomic. Advise me where to dispose my vehicle, and I shall enter upon tenancy forthwith."

I could see what was coming before Carrie even answered.

"You might as well have another slice of this nice persimmon pie," she told him. "My other boarder's got a few things in the hangar right now but I'll see he empties it out for you. And what's the matter with my coffee? You haven't had but five cups."

"I consider moderation best, don't you?" Herc answered. "As the ancient Greeks accurately advised—the middle course."

"Every course goes to my middle," Carrie replied. "But you needn't worry about old Greek joints as long as you live here—I'll fix your lunch every day in a suitcase. Now, if you've quite finished eating I'll show you the hangar for your plane."

KNOWING I was in for it I followed them downstairs. Carrie introduced me.

"Ah," said Herc, driving my skull between my shoulders with a pat on the head. "The household's white-haired boy, I see. Kindly identify this marvelous metallic monstrosity, my fatuously funny friend."

"Don't call him friend till the hangar's cleared," Carrie advised. "This is supposed to be a mechanical cook, he says. Now I think of it that's an insult!"

"Any attempt to displace your internationalized culinary artistry with mechanistic meddling is sacrilegious," Herc promptly agreed. "This glittering gargoyle must go—particularly inasmuch as I've contracted to rent the space it occupies."

"Contracted, hey?" I snorted. "That means you let him get by without paying! Carrie, you're being taken for a ride—on a dump-plane. Why not let things stand? At least I pay cash."

"Now you've insulted us both!" Carrie snapped. "You get that gadget out of here, understand? I'll give you exactly one week and if it's still here then you'll go with it!"

"You heard the lady!" Herc echoed malliciously. "One week to shrink to invisibility this impious implement of insult. And if you shrink from the task I'll personally diminish you to a damaged dot of dirt!" He turned and lumbered upstairs.

"*Ha!*" mocked Carrie, following him back to the kitchen for a snack. "Get yourself Sanforized, milksop!"

Poor Carrie! I knew she'd be sorry for speaking to me like that.

She had certainly fallen for her new boarder, to have extended credit for the first time in a long life. The heavy hand of love had made her a soft touch—she thought she itched for Hardhart but it was only the wool over her eyes.

Because her Herc certainly looked like the kind that thinks husband is something you do with your money. She'd never get him. She wouldn't even collect for board—I could tell right away he'd unpurse nothing but his fat lips.

Well, when it was over, a flash in the frying-pan, she'd need my new invention to cheer her up. And I certainly didn't intend to do away with my Cybernetic Cooker for a pot-bellied gigolo. But getting out of that didn't look so hard once I'd thought about it awhile.

I got the idea trying to figure Carrie's mind. Like all matter, including her gray-matter, my invention was full of vacant space. The open emptiness in and around atoms takes up most of anything's volume.

So all I'd have to do was suck the empty space out of my Cybernetic Cooker, move the Cooker to the kitchen, pour the space back in again and I'd be all set.

What I needed was a Two-Way Space Pump.

I set to work that same night. First thing was to strip the Cybernetic Cooker for equipment to build the Pump. That fooled Herc and Carrie into thinking I was dismantling the Cooker but of course I only took it completely apart in order to avoid dismantling it. They were outwitted, that's all.

But they didn't pay much attention anyhow, being busy with their own problems. Every time Carrie hinted at rent-money Herc would put her off by praising her cooking.

And his appetite was more flattering to Carrie than a dozen Nero Wolfe orchids. She forgot all about money and lay awake every other night thinking up new dishes. The nights in between she lay awake because she'd eaten them. Among other things, she fixed him sweet lentil pudding, minced pie à la sour cream, fried ravioli with sugar icing, baked alaska in tomato sauce, dill-pickle ice cream, and chocolate-covered frankfurters à la Felix.

Neither had time for me, so I could concentrate on saving my Cybernetic Cooker. By the end of the allotted week it had entirely disappeared. In its place, made of its parts and a few others, was my Two-Way Space Pump. It took up very little more hangar-space than the Cooker had.

AND the Space Pump worked perfectly. Its field of electronic gravitation was transmitted in two cones for about five feet to front and rear. The front cone pumped the space from anything within range, reducing the gravitational potential of the sub-atomic particles. It shrunk things to dustmote size, unchanged in weight or chemistry. The rear field-cone returned the space to anything shrunk without disturbing ordinary matter.

One thing, though—the hangar was fuller than ever. But I knew how to make room for Herc's plane. I'd just build a second Space Pump. Then I'd use it to shrink the first one. I'd move that one, shrunk, to the kitchen.

Next, I'd build a third Space Pump—demand would be world-wide, anyhow—use it to shrink the second and take that one upstairs too. With the second Space Pump I'd restore the first one's size, so it could be rebuilt into the Cybernetic Cooker.

Simple! I was sure the second Space Pump would restore the first one even when shrunk by the third, so all Carrie'd have to do was enlarge her kitchen till it could hold the Cooker. Then, with the third Space Pump still unshrunk in the hangar, we'd have this slight addition to the kitchen under which to park Herc's plane.

But you know how women are. I tried to explain when Carrie checked on the basement at the end of the week but she just stood on the bottom step, sucking a grapefruit, and refused to listen.

"Wiz Bye, I'm simply not building a new hangar!" she said obstinately. "And Mr. Hardhart will be very angry. I don't know what-all he'll do."

What he did, when she called him to look at the spot his plane still couldn't occupy, was try to chisel. "Since that glittering gargantuosity remains heaped in my hangar," he told me, "I shall have to haul it to the midocean dump first thing tomorrow morning—at your expense. That will be a hundred fifty dollars—payable immediately."

He lunged for my collar but I got Carrie between us.

"Honey," I said to her, ignoring my huge antagonist as you'd ignore an angry elephant, "don't let it be said you can't appreciate my wonderful Two-Way Space Pump. This invention works! It shrinks things!"

"Shrinks?" she repeated. "Why use a machine? We've got plenty of water."

"Will water shrink uranium?" I demanded. "Lookit!"

I turned on the machine, picked a lump from the fuel-bin and tossed it before the Two-Way Space Pump—into the reduction-field. The ore that left my hands a chunk thudded to the floor a mere speck of grit.

"My good fuel!" Carrie wailed. "You put that back, Wiz Bye!"

"Easily," I said easily. I reached under the invisible cone of energy, picked up the grit—quite a job, because of its concentrated, unchanged weight—held it under the restoring-cone and let them watch it return to normal.

"Magic!" cried Carrie and looked at me with new respect.

But Herc Hardhart was skeptical. "An oddly obvious optical illusion," he gibed.

Well, I showed him all right—demonstrated the Two-Way Space Pump on all kinds of things. Carrie got a big kick out of it. She was so interested she laid down her grapefruit and even forgot to eat the cold garlic-bread bulging the pocket of her tent-like house dress.

But Herc was scheming as usual. After thinking awhile he said, "Our funny friend flings a fine farewell frolic, doesn't he, Carrie? I almost wish his allotted week were not ending and that he were not under a solemn obligation to depart first thing in the morning, leaving his devious device behind as payment for the rental of my hangar."

"Gee-whiz, Wiz!" said Carrie, doubtfully. I opened my mouth to tell Herc off but he reached around Carrie to choke me with a gagging hand as he went on talking.

"Our luscious luck will be ludicrously lucrative," he boasted to Carrie, grinning at my fruitless struggles to escape his iron grip. "With the machine in my hangar and the hangar a part of your boarding-house we each have a fifty-percent interest in this pricelessly profitable Pump. We'll be participating partners in a pleasantly productive promotional enterprise."

Almost before he had finished talking, Carrie flung herself into his arms with a staggering thump. "Oh, Herc," she cooed, "what a sweet way to ask for my hand! Partners! Not a single one of my other husbands ever thought to be so—so delicate. I never dreamed your proposal would be this romantic, with me over forty by several years."

"Several decades, darling," Herc found breath to say brutally as he ducked under her headlock. "There seems to be a silly sort of slip somewhere, Sister. Our partnership will be purely platonic!"

CARRIE stared at him for a long silence, pitiful tears dribbling from her eyepouches. Then she let him have it right in the ears like a disappointed fire-siren.

"The idea!" she raged. "After what I've cooked for you and all! Herc Hardhart, you're—you're as beastly as a zoo! You eat like a hog, act like a wolf, look like a hippo and talk nothing but bull! Wiz," she commanded, turning imperiously to me," throw this lyin' tiger out with the other alley tomcats!"

I'd moved away when Carrie made Herc accidentally let me go and I wanted to stay away. Herc looked down like a huge red-painted water-tower with two flexing fists and a vicious leer.

But you know how women are. I had to do something. For Honor and the Space Pump I rared back on tip-toe.

"Go pack your things," I demanded, "or we'll call ten cops!"

"Lie low, larrikin," said Herc contemptuously, "or living locally there'll be one lily-livered little lunkhead the less!"

"He can't say that to us!" Carrie objected. "Poke his jaw, Wiz!"

But in that basement I had no chair to stand on. I could only punch his prominent middle.

It was a haymaking swipe that buried my right to the elbow with the sound and feel of hitting an air-mattress. I leaned against him, dragging my fist from the cave it'd made for itself.

Herc laughed jeeringly. The vibration of his innards tossed me to the wall.

"We're not hurt!" Carrie encouraged. "Up and at him!"

With my breath knocked out I slid down the wall, was almost sitting when Carrie waddled to my side.

"Don't let that throw you," she said, and picked me up like a sack of sugar.

She set me on my shaking feet. I was woozy. The room was going around. Thinking to help, Carrie shoved me toward Herc. I staggered, and lurched unseeing into the reduction-cone of my Space Pump.

Instantly the floor came up and almost hit me.

I'd shrunk! I felt crazily smaller than an ant's uncle, heavier than a lapful of Carrie. The smooth concrete floor seemed to have broken out in a rash of mountains and was strewn with boulders of dust.

Everything in sight had been magnified almost beyond recognition. And I was as helpless as if my underwear had turned to steel.

It took me a minute to figure out why. My body had retained all its weight but my muscles had shrunk until they were almost microscopic. It was a struggle to breathe even—but the air shrunk in the energy-cone flowed into my lungs by gravity because I was on my back.

Everything confused me—I was a stranger to myself. At first I even thought I was my own ghost.

Herc and Carrie thought so too. When I got adjusted I could hear them arguing.

"I did not kill him!" Carrie sobbed.

"Yes, you did," Herc insisted. "You are a madly menacing murderess, Madam. And for profit—for the proceeds of the Pump. You bopped boarder Bye to bag big bounty."

That foxy skunk was a rat! I'd have given my checked garters to have been able to reassure Carrie—and to have pointed out that Herc was trying to gull her and she should give him the bird. I yelled but she couldn't hear. My voice had shrunk to the size of Hardhart's conscience.

"Your nervousness is not necessary," he went on cold bloodedly, "if you purchase protection through partnership. Follow my fifty-fifty formula to fame and fortune and we won't worry where Wiz went."

Carrie didn't answer right away. I couldn't turn my head to see her. I had to lie there wondering whether she'd end her days as an honest jail-bird, railroaded for murder by that red-headed hogger, or die rich and unhappy as his thieving partner.

I knew what I'd have done in her place. The thought chilled.

"The very idea!" she said finally. "Making me a proposition like that! You were the one fighting Wiz when he disappeared! I'll testify against you in every court of the land—and be believed, too!"

I fell in love with her then and there. But you know how women are. She went right on talking.

"There's only one kind of partnership interests me in the slightest, Herc Hardhart. Remember, a wife can't testify against her husband!"

It was Herc's turn to hesitate. "Carrie," he said at last, choking on the words, "my life and liberty are lost unless we pursue happiness together as groom and bride."

"Oh, darling," she gushed, "you're so sweet! But don't kiss me yet—we're probably not alone. Wiz must be on the floor somewhere. And we can't just steal his invention right out from over his nose. Find him, Herc, dear."

"Find, finish and forget," said Herc grimly.

I didn't like the tone of his voice. All he had to do was turn off the machine, and I'd be asphyxiated for want of concentrated air my shrunken lungs could breathe. And I figured he'd shut down the Pump to hunt me in safety.

LUCKILY he didn't. I could hear him grunting as he squatted and decided he was putting his eye close to the floor, staring along its surface to find me. He must have thought me alive because from here on he whispered rather than talked aloud.

First thing I knew, a pair of lever-jawed pliers closed on my head and I was dragged from under the energy-cone. Then, with a heave and a groan, Herc lifted me to my bench and tossed me onto the vise-anvil.

I knew he wanted to kill me but was too dizzy to worry about impending death. As a matter of fact I was already half dead. There wasn't enough oxygen for me in unshrunken air and my chest was too heavy for its muscles. I was suffocating.

Herc located my sledge-hammer. I saw it flash through the air toward my head. He was going to hammer out a solution to his problem, all right!

His first blow landed with a crash. It didn't hurt! Succeeding blows partly snapped me out of it. The double-dealer wielding the double-jack was giving me artificial respiration though he didn't know it.

His repeated blows forced air in and out of my lungs until my head cleared a little. Not enough, though—I was lightheaded and foolish like a high-latitude flier who forgets to cut in his mask.

What I wanted was shrunken air. So when Herc put me on the edge of the vise, trying to cut me in two, I gave a clumsy wiggle and rolled off.

Landing was a shock. I tore through something soft and was stuck fast in evil-smelling darkness, right next to a large warm object I couldn't make out.

"My corn!" Herc yelled. "The cad has conked my corn!"

He was lying, of course. I had just grazed his foot, and had pierced the insole of his shoe, netted and held there by his strong—and strong-smelling—nylon socks. But I still weighed my regular hundred twenty-five pounds.

Herc must have picked up his foot in two hands and tried to shake me loose, because he lost his balance and fell. I felt myself twisting and turning as I swung with the movements of his foot, still stuck in the stinking shoe. Only half-conscious before, I was partly revived by the thud as Herc hit the concrete floor.

He lay on his back like a beetle that's been turned over, feebly waving his overweighted foot. And one wave passed me through the rear cone of my Two-Way Space Pump.

Instantly I found myself restored to full size. I was standing on Herc's sore toe, the sledge within reach on the bench. I lunged out dizzily and grabbed

it. Then I swung the hammer within an inch of Herc's red nose.

"Had enough?" I demanded brusquely.

Herc looked at the hammer and at my face and at Carrie, standing with arms akimbo behind me. He knew when he was licked.

"Let me up," he pleaded. "Get off my toe and let me up! I'll be good."

Before he had time to change his mind, I ran him out of the house and threw his clothes out after him.

But you know how women are. Carrie was weeping when I joined her in the kitchen—sobbing and consoling herself with a peanut-butter, jelly, margarine, tomato and sardine sandwich.

"You—you bully, you!" she howled. "You ran my fiancé right out of my own house. Now I'll go to my grave a lone, lorn widow—poor, too."

"Why Carrie Coles," I said, surprised. "You've got it all wrong. I was saving you from a fate worse than death. And a fine widow of your accomplishments won't stay single long."

HER tearful face brightened in a sparkling smile with bits of sandwich showing at the corners. "Always indirect, aren't you, Wiz, dear," she fluttered. "It's so sweet of you to ask. And of course I will. Just imagine, Carrie Coles Bye, wife of Wiz Bye, the famous inventor!

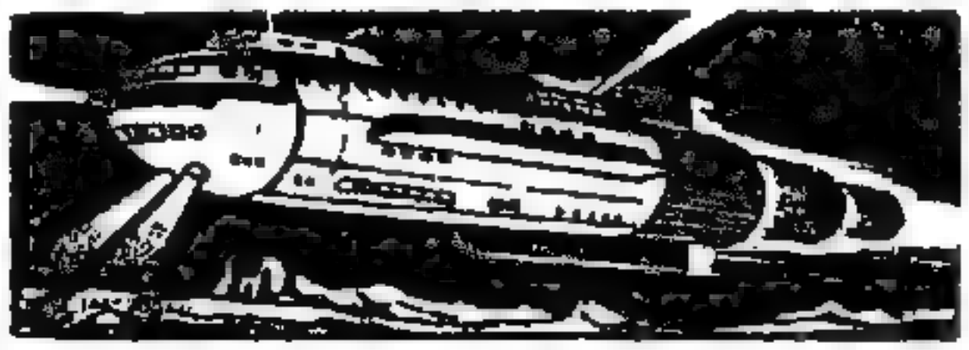
"Now you'll not have to move your wonderful Pump. Isn't it just too thrilling? Dear, to celebrate our engagement I'm going to get busy right now, making some nice Chinese bird's-nest soup—with matzoh balls in it."

A wonderful woman, Carrie. She made me set up in business, pointed out how Herc Hardhart had promised to get her rich and gave me the incentive to buy huge billets of tool-steel, sharpen them, shrink them in my Two-Way Space Pump and sell them as cutting-tool bits to big manufacturers. That was the start of my career.

But a man not only needs an idea and a process, as I had, he needs a special incentive if he's to become really rich. Carrie furnished that too.

You see, she wouldn't let me rebuild my Cybernetic Cooker—still thought it insulting. So, just as her cooking had given me the original idea, it now gave me the ambition to become really rich—so rich, in fact, that it was soon out of the question for my wife to prepare her own meals. You know how women are.

But in the long run all that I am or hope to be I owe to my aching stomach. And now please excuse me—it's time I swallowed a pill and took a powder.



A perfect crime is tough enough on Earth, but on a strange planet the odds are even greater against a killer, as proved in—

URANIAN JUSTICE

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Coming Next Issue!

COSMIC ENCORES

(Continued from page 6)

modern American, looking down from his still-rising average height of five feet nine or ten, the five-foot-two-inch average Roman is almost a pygmy himself. Yet in his day he was a pretty big man, as a rule at least as tall or taller than the people he conquered.

And there are whole bales of written evidence to the effect that, in the eyes of the Romans, Attila and his Huns were miniature monsters. Since heights of five feet or less could hardly have been remarkable to the average Roman it would appear that the average Hun must have been shorter still—definitely within the Little People range.

It seems likely that this entire matter of size relates directly to diet. Man's physical growth depends largely upon the amount of protein in his diet. In his most primitive form man is a hunting meat-eating animal—and in areas where game is plentiful has been known to grow to considerable size. Hence the comparatively tall Cro-Magnons and the Norsemen. The former were huntsmen in a comparatively easy environment—that of Southern France—while the latter were forced to live largely on meat due to the short grain-growing season of their native lands.

The world over, when humanity first began to assemble in settled communities, these communities depended upon tillage of the soil and growth of various grains from which bread could be made. Farming was so much easier than hunting in the comparative comfort and safety of a non-nomadic home that bread rather than meat became the staple human diet.

And with the transfer from proteins to starches human size, over the centuries, began to shrink. The effect of rice staples upon the Southern Chinese and Japanese is very evident today. And though in some areas, notably Rome, the bread was implemented with salad vegetables, olive oil and occasionally fruit or fowl, most people lived on bread, meat and cheese. Also fish if they happened to reside near lake, sea or ocean.

Diet of a King

In Plutarch we were recently intrigued to discover that Antigonus, King of Macedonia and much of Asia Minor after Alexander the Great, was accustomed to dine on a lamb shank

[Turn page]

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and birds' brains. This was the diet of a king, mind you, not that of helot, commoner or even noble. If the king failed to rate a roast or a sirloin steak no wonder the average height was low.

The whole idea of wasting grain to raise meat was so terrifying to our hungry ancestors that in many places, notably India, they made it a religious crime to kill or eat the cow or goat, thus ensuring small stature for their descendants.

Hence it seems to us entirely possible that "little people" should have survived until comparatively recent historic times, if not into the "spirit photographs" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. And what more likely than that a lonely troglodyte survivor should, when driven by winter cold, seek food and warmth away from his cave by hiding at night in the thatched cottage of some nearby farmer. Trolls and poltergeists seldom appeared to latter-day humans in daylight or the summertime.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

WE HAVE, we believe, a fine lead novel for our Fall issue—nothing less than BEYOND PLUTO by John Scott Campbell. First published in the now-defunct WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, Summer issue, 1932, this is a brilliant story in which past, present, future and deep space are excitingly blended, one which has stood the passage of almost two decades without losing luster or credibility.

It deals with the amazing adventures of Professor Lawrence and his colleague, Dr. Cummings, geologists, who cross the paths in Cairo of a pair of famed British archeologists, on the trail of some strange discoveries unearthed in the region of the Upper Nile.

The parties join forces and almost before they can get under way find themselves under mysterious and persistent attack. They also acquire the company of the enigmatic Professor Ludwig Pfeiffler, Heidelberg biologist and physiologist, whose mission strangely parallels their own.

And then, behind an apparently impassible mountain barrier, they discover indications of a scientifically advanced and utterly unknown elvilization, fully equipped to conceal its presence from all but the most persistent of questing human eyes. They come upon a city of skyscrapers in the midst of a fertile valley, a city some fifteen miles in diameter, whose culture is far ahead of twentieth-century man as the latter is ahead of the primitive natives of Central Africa.

In this city they find the highway to space and to adventures as totally unexpected as they are galactic in scope. They find intrigue, romance, danger and ever-present threat of death in the far planets. They find and live the magic that makes this one of the outstanding science fiction novels of the last twenty years.

FSM for Fall will contain plenty of other material—a novelet or two and a full set of short stories, all but two of the latter culled from the finest early stf source material available. With BEYOND PLUTO for its lead it should shape up as an outstanding issue. You'll not want to miss it.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

OUR opening letter poses an interesting problem—so let's at it and ponder its import. It is—

TRANSLATION, PLEASE
by Macit Cizdemozlu

Dear Sir: I am originally from Turkey. I arrived at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1946 and obtained my B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering there. For five years I have read every issue of FSQ as soon as it came out. It is only fair to say that I like FSQ very much and will keep reading it as long as I can find it.

I note that FSM is read in all English-speaking countries and by English-speaking people in non-English-speaking countries. So far, so good. But it is easy to see that the circle is not completed for the majority of people on Earth do not speak or read English. To that majority my country contributes at least five or six million people of my age group (25) who would love to be able to read science fiction.

FSM does a good job of supplying good science fiction to the interested people in the U.S.A. But how about those in my country that do not get it? Obviously there are two answers. One—teach all of them English. Two—translate FSM into their own language.

The first is very impracticable. It is a slow and long process. The second however eliminates all of the disadvantages of the first and is promising in itself. I feel that with my training in science and my bilingual standing I can do a good job of translating every issue of FSM into Turkish.

My purpose in writing to you is more than to gain employment. It is to enlarge the circle of activity of FSM and supply the millions of potential FSM readers with good science fiction. I am very eager to receive your answer either by letter

or in the *Cosmic Encores* of FSM, which I always read. I hope I will not be disappointed.—P.O. Box #665, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Unfortunately, Macit, we fear that you are going to be disappointed. You mention five or six million possible readers—great. But in view of our circulation with a potential fifty or sixty million readers in America the possible returns from printing a Turkish edition of FSQ would seem to be so much potential red ink from a business viewpoint.

But thanks for the offer and we hope you will find some interesting stf contacts through the publishing of your letter in this space. And certainly we must honor you as the oldest (in point of issues) FSM reader extant—five years on a magazine that has been in print only a year and a half.

TEN YEAR WAIT?
by Tom Condit

Dear Editor: I see in the latest FSM that you are publishing "THE CONQUERORS" by Dr.

[*Turn page*]

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Keller in your next issue. I trust you will not wait 10 years before publishing the sequel "THE EVENING STAR"?

A few other good selections would be:

CITIES IN THE AIR by Ed Hamilton (Air Wonder, Nov.-Dec. 1929); THE INFINITE BRAIN by John Campbell (Sci. Wonder, May 1930); THE SHOT INTO INFINITY (Sci. Wonder Qtly., Fall 1929) and its sequel THE STONE FROM THE MOON (Sci. Wonder Qtly., Spr. 1930) by Otto Willi Gail; THE SKY RULER by Ed Earl Repp (Air Wonder, May 1930); MEN WITH WINGS (Air Wonder, July 1929) and its sequel WOMEN WITH WINGS (Air Wonder, May 1930) by Leslie Stone; THE MOON CONQUERORS by R. H. Romans (Sci. Wonder Qtly., Win. '29-30): (I'll hound you to the grave if you don't publish this one and the Gail stories)

and of course there's always the SCIENCE-FICTION SERIES.

By the way I notice your readers keep referring to the first issue of Wonder as June, 1929. I always thought it went this way—June 1929, 1st issue Sci. Wonder; July 1929, 1st issue Air Wonder; Fall 1929, 1st issue Sci. Wonder Qtly.; June 1930, Sci. Wonder & Air Wonder merge to form WONDER STORIES. Am I right? 3370 N. Mangum St., Baldwin Pk., California.

No, THE EVENING STAR will be the lead novel in our Winter Issue of 1952—hardly a ten-year lag. Thereafter we have a number of sterling old-timers in mind, including some of those you list. And we shall certainly look into the Romans epos. As for your chronology, it checks with us. Probably the boys are referring to the whole Gernsback-Wonder chain euphemistically.

OLD WEINBAUM
by M. McNeil

Dear Editor: The other day I was strolling past a newsstand when I noticed a crowd of people fighting around an overturned mag truck. So, says I, 'The new FSM's must be in.' I jumped into the mob and came out triumphant, with a battered FSM under my arm. Retiring to my room, I sat down to read my prize.

Bergey's cover is awful. Not only is the dame hideous, but the fragments of the ship are going *DOWN*!!!!!!!!. Doesn't that dope know that they would just stay there, in space? Or, if they fell anywhere, they would fall toward the planet in the background?

Vandals of the Void is good. Very different. Very exciting. 'Nuff said.

Earth's Lucky Day was *EXCELLENT*. MORE!!! MORE!!!

Osmotic Theorem was *BETTER THAN ELDI SUPER!!!* Frogeyes, give the man permanent access to the xeno tubs!!!

The rest would have gotten first place in a normal mag almost anyday.

WE WANT WEINBAUM!!! But please, before you print common ones like Ideal, print the

rare ones. "Shifting Seas" (AS, Apr. '37), "Revolution of 1950" (AS, Oct.-Nov. '38), and "Tidal Moon" are almost unobtainable.

If this letter gets printed, here is an appeal. I need a lot of old Startlings. I will pay a reasonable price for said mags. Inquiries do not need return postage.

What is WSA and where is it obtainable and how much is it?—2146 Stanmore, Houston, Texas.

Unfortunately we do not have the reprint rights to the Weinbaum stories you mention. And for the time being those we have, have been too recently reprinted in of Hall of Fame feature (now defunct) in STARTLING STORIES. But we'll be reprinting the young master again as soon as is feasible. A pox on you for your comments on our cover—or perhaps a Bergey on you might be worse. Don't let the Bergey Man frighten you—he's really a nice lad and a very good cover artist.

Oh, yes—and WSA (WONDER STORY ANNUAL) is our annual reprint anthology. The 1951 edition is currently on the newsstands and can be purchased for the fourth part of a dollar, one not-so-thin quarter or twenty-five cents.

Which brings us down to the closing wire. Thanks for writing and thanks to those whose letters arrived too late for inclusion. We read them and ponder their contents just the same, try whenever possible to act upon their suggestions. We'll be seeing you next month in SS, the month after that (August) in TWS and then back at the Encore stand once more. So long.

—THE EDITOR.

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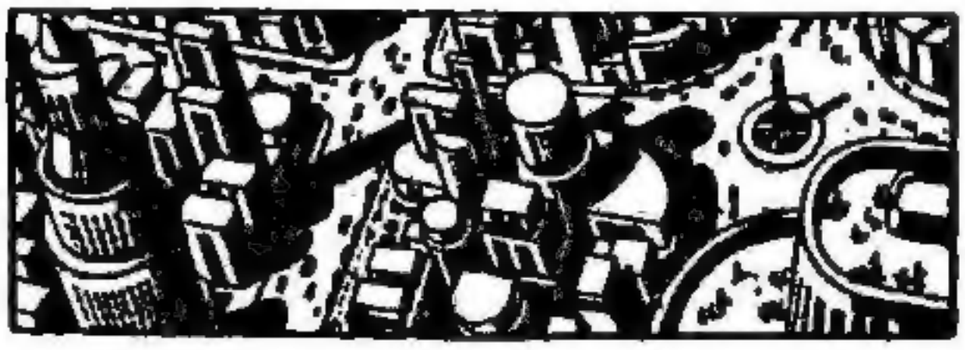

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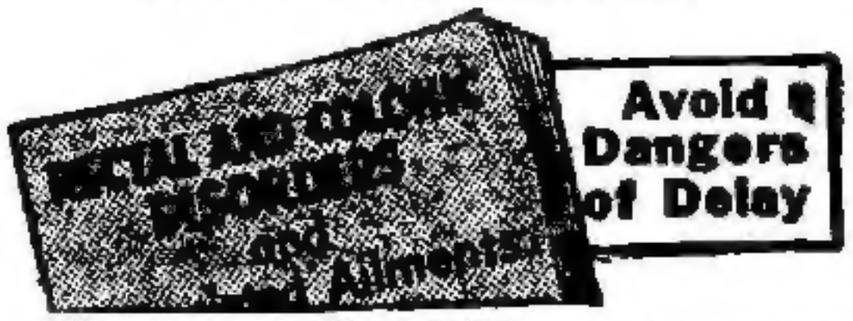

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